



**U.S.-Central European Relations
in the Age of Obama**

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**Edited by A. Wess Mitchell
and Ted Reinert
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Executive Summary

During the George W. Bush era in U.S. foreign policy, America's relations with the ten new democracies of Central Europe went from historical high to all-time low in just a few years' time. Prevailing analytical wisdom holds that the Iraq War experience, together with the gravitational pull of the European project, has had a corrosive effect on these relationships, spelling the end of "New" Europe as a geopolitical concept and depriving America of its special status in the region. To test these assumptions, CEPA asked analysts from each of the ten new post-communist EU member states to assess the health and trajectory of their countries' bilateral relationships with the United States in the immediate post-Bush era. The results are surprising. Despite signs of unmistakable strain, regional linkages with the United States remain robust – held together by common perspectives on Ukraine and the Western Balkans, nervousness about Russian reanimation and the absence of a clear EU security alternative. Contributions from the German, Russian and EU institutional perspectives round off the report.

Introduction

Two thousand nine is a year of anniversaries for the new democracies of Central Europe.¹ By year's end, eight of the region's ten capitals will have celebrated five years in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), eight will have celebrated five years in the European Union (EU) and six will have celebrated two decades of independence from Soviet rule. For only the second time in modern history, the Central European geopolitical space is composed of democratic, self-governing nation-states. Like their predecessors of the interwar period, today's new democracies can claim to have survived twenty years; unlike their predecessors, they will live to see twenty-one.

Yet even as they celebrate their hard-won independence and return to the West, these states face an external environment that is radically different from anything they or their American and Western European allies anticipated in the heady days following the end of communism. A revisionist Russia; an introspective Europe; a distracted United States – all represent unwelcome obstacles in the effort to consolidate and expand the zone of freedom in Europe's east.

Against this backdrop of geopolitical flux, Central European capitals must also navigate a changing political relationship with the United States. The link they share with America has long been a special one. To Central Europeans, the post-Cold War United States was a different kind of superpower: security guarantor,

¹ Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

midwife to NATO (and in some respects, EU) accession, and champion of the continued eastward expansion of Western values and institutions. To American policymakers, the Central Europeans were a different kind of ally: pioneers of democratization and free market reform, Atlanticist makeweights in NATO and the EU, and co-laborers in high-profile U.S. military missions.

The Iraq War brought out both the best and the worst in U.S.-Central European bilateral relations. From a historic high at the signing of the Letter of the Vilnius Ten in early 2003, America's stock in the New Europe fell, in a few years' time, to an all-time low amid disagreements over visa waiver and missile defense. Some regional governments were disappointed by Washington's reluctance to provide political or economic concessions in exchange for their wartime support. Most, from 2004 on, began to view the U.S. link as declining in importance alongside EU integration. All would respond with greater caution to U.S. requests for international military support today than they did six years ago.

The August 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia brought a new set of concerns to the surface in U.S.-Central European relations. The perceived inadequacy of U.S. and NATO responses to the conflict created a sharpened sense of insecurity in Poland and the Baltic States and raised fresh doubts about the depth and sincerity of Western security commitments in the region.

Rather than assuaging these concerns, the early policy maneuvers of the Obama administration appear, on balance, to have heightened them. For governments in Poland and the Czech Republic, the administration's cautious stance on missile defense has stoked fears of political over-extension and U.S. disengagement. Across the region, the new U.S. emphasis on "resetting" relations with Russia has resurrected old fears of geopolitical isolation, while the slackening of U.S. support for eastward NATO enlargement has created the prospect, for the first time since 1990, of a disconnect between Washington and its Central European allies on a first-tier strategic agenda item.

What is the health and trajectory of these bilateral relationships in the post-Bush, early-Obama era? What are the most pressing agenda items that, from the perspectives of the ten Central European capitals, need to be addressed by the new administration? What can these mostly small and mid-sized states offer the United States as it confronts an unprecedented international security dilemma?

These are the questions that this report addressed, in survey form, to leading analysts and scholars from each of the ten new post-communist EU member states. To gain a more complete picture, the report also asked analysts from Berlin, Moscow and Brussels to assess attitudes toward the new member states from the German, Russian and EU institutional perspectives; to identify areas of

overlap and conflict with perceived U.S. goals in the region; and to pinpoint their own expectations for the new administration.

Viewed collectively, the responses of the thirteen contributors offer a snapshot of the Central European region and its place in transatlantic, intra-EU and U.S.-EU-Russia relations twenty years after Communism and six months into a new U.S. administration. By providing a panoramic view of the region's national actors, the status of their ongoing integration into EU political structures and the often conflicting interests and perspectives of their larger neighbors, the report seeks to provide U.S. policymakers with a sharper analytical lens through which to assess America's goals in the region and chart a course to renewed vitality in U.S.-Central European and U.S.-EU relations.

The Visegrád Group

Czech Republic

Vít Strělecký, Institute of International Relations, Prague

The Czech Republic, together with other post-Communist EU members, appeared to be in an awkward situation at the beginning of the Iraq War. The trans-Atlantic dispute created uncomfortable pressure for the Czech Republic to “choose” between the United States and “old” Europe. The conditions were illustrated and underlined by former French President Jacques Chirac on one side and Donald Rumsfeld’s attempt to divide Europe – while failing to perceive not only the general commonalities of Europe as a whole, but particular differences within the ranks of the so-called “new” Europe – on the other. The Czech Republic more or less successfully managed to maneuver between the conflicting positions, sending non-fighting teams to Iraq and avoiding any direct link to its participation in the coalition of willing (a different path than that of another “new” European country – Poland).

Once trans-Atlantic relations had settled, the agenda of Czech-American relations became dominated by a single topic – missile defense – that has comprised other relevant issues as well. One such area is the stimulation of research and development in the realm of security and defense following the implementation of the third site of the National Missile Defense (NMD) system on Czech soil (again, the trajectory and result of the Polish-American negotiations were quite different from those of the Czech negotiations).

Finally, I consider the NATO-ization of the third site as the most important achievement of Czech diplomacy. The consent of the U.S. administration to such a shift and later the consensus of all NATO members (both cemented in the Bucharest Declaration of April 2008) provide room for a meaningful strategic debate regarding missile threats in Europe. This debate should be based on an understanding of the interconnections between NATO’s plan to develop the Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense system and the NMD system’s third site.

Given the fact that NMD is highly unpopular among the Czech public, it should be understood in Washington that the Topolánek government invested a lot of political capital in pursuing this program. The interruption of its implementation, which is indeed expected, would in fact spoil the Czech government’s efforts, making a future revival questionable.

As the issue of the NMD is slowly disappearing, the most pressing political and security issue is related to the presence of Russia, both on the European and international stage. The Czech Republic has never been the strongest anti-Russia warrior (compared to the Baltic states or Poland, for example). However, the country is still sensitive to Russian geopolitical pronouncements and manifestations. Similarly, Central and Eastern European states in general view the current assertive foreign policy of Russia with a certain uneasiness that tends to be magnified by juxtaposition with the views of other European countries.

The Czech Republic would see any attempts to redefine the current security and political order in Europe on the basis of a new “understanding” of terms such as “territorial sovereignty” as undesirable and even dangerous. The Czech Republic has only very reluctantly recognized the independence of Kosovo, which should by no means be seen as a precedent. It would be unfortunate to compromise the principles of the current political and security order in Europe in exchange, for example, for getting an easier agreement to the renegotiation of the strategic nonproliferation or WMD treaties. Such a strategy might turn out to be shortsighted.

The economic crisis also cannot be missing from the agenda. The role of the Czech Republic has increased with its current EU presidency. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the partner for the Obama administration should obviously be the entire EU.

The Czech EU presidency may most likely lead to a better understanding of the European Union and bring about the next phase of the Europeanization of the country. Nevertheless, this process should not be seen as contradictory to the belief in the importance of the Atlanticist orientation of Czech foreign and security policy. The Obama administration evokes some hope that cooperation with the EU based on dialogue and mutual respect might be achieved. The Czech Republic will always support such a non-divisive setting, particularly if the United States returns to an effective multilateralism. More practically, despite some internal troubles, the Czech Republic is ready to cooperate with the United States on the implementation of the third site within the aforementioned wider framework of NATO. However, a major challenge could arise if the United States follows the precedent of the Cold War’s “peaceful coexistence” and turns to the strategy of a superpower condominium, cutting major strategic deals directly with Russia without involving Washington’s European allies.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Czech Republic may not have been the most enthusiastic supporter of U.S. actions, but it has definitely been a reliable partner. Although the relatively significant Czech presence in missions and operations abroad has lately become an issue of contention in domestic politics, there is no

reason for the United States to expect that Czech engagement in these areas should decrease.

Hungary

Tamás Magyarics, ICDT, Budapest

Currently, there are no major problems in the bilateral relations between the United States and Hungary. And with Hungary's addition to the U.S. Visa Waiver Program in 2008, a sensitive issue was resolved. However, the political elite and public are divided over whether Hungary should admit inmates from Guantanamo if asked to do so by the Obama administration – Hungary had a rather disappointing experience with a group of Cuban refugees who came from Guantanamo. Moreover, the individuals to be released from Guantanamo might pose a serious security risk to the country, while the Cubans refugees did not pose such a danger. Similarly, mixed feelings would likely greet any requests from the Obama administration for a more prominent Hungarian role in Afghanistan, where Hungary is currently in charge of a Provincial Reconstruction Team.

Another potential source of friction between the Obama administration and Hungary may be an American request for higher defense spending. Though current expenditures stand around 1 percent of GDP and are well under the promised rate (2 percent), even a tiny increase in spending would have serious political repercussions which no political force in Hungary can take on – and that is why such an American request is not likely to come. However, even if the United States is not pressing for more “input,” it might want to see more “output” within the framework of burden sharing.

Undoubtedly, the most pressing agenda item Hungary would like to see the Obama administration address is the economic crisis. A healthy U.S. economy is indispensable to lifting Hungary out of the current financial trouble due to trans-Atlantic economic interdependence and the ripple effect a strong American economy has on smaller nations. Direct American investment in Hungary is relatively low; therefore Hungary's gains (or losses) correlate directly with the status of the U.S.-EU economic relationship.

A more active American role in providing energy security would also be greatly appreciated in Hungary. Gazprom is seen as a political tool in the hands of the Kremlin, and Moscow is perceived to be attempting to monopolize the supply of energy and, to a certain extent, even the distribution of energy to a number of European countries, including Hungary. There is a more general concern growing in Hungary stemming from a more assertive Russian economic and political presence in Central Europe – and in Hungary. Moscow seems to be

striving to drive a wedge between countries within the EU and loosen the bonds of the trans-Atlantic relationship. Furthermore, Hungary is one of the EU's so-called Atlanticist countries and, therefore, would like to see a more prominent American presence in Central Europe, especially through the use of soft power.

The major players in Hungarian politics support the deployment of missile defense sites in the Czech Republic and Poland. Nevertheless, the Obama administration may end up bargaining away the Central European components of the system (by officially shelving the program) for Russian cooperation in more pressing (and short term) issues such as the opening of supply routes to Afghanistan and/or the Iranian nuclear problem.

Hungary has rather limited capabilities for any substantial assistance to the United States in solving the more prominent global issues. Unfortunately, Hungary is more a part of the problem than a part of the solution in the current financial crisis. Nevertheless, Hungary may offer contributions on a modest scale in addressing a few issues. First, in closing down Guantanamo, though admitting former inmates into Hungary would entail substantial political and security risks for Budapest. Second, Hungary's commitment to deploy troops in Afghanistan expires later this year; undoubtedly the Obama administration would appreciate a continued Hungarian military – and potentially civilian – presence there. Third, Hungary will certainly continue the close law-enforcement and intelligence cooperation with the United States in the fight against terrorism. Fourth, Hungary may, to a small degree, contribute to strengthening the U.S. negotiating positions vis-à-vis Russia if Washington does not “flirt” with Moscow on issues such as energy security. Fifth, Hungary will assume the European Union presidency in the first half of 2011; at that time Budapest will be in a position to shape the agenda of the EU. And, sixth, the current EU government has ignored the benefits of Central European strategic cooperation. If there were a change in this position, the EU's Atlanticist bloc (including the Baltic states) would become stronger. Some formal and informal American encouragement would be helpful in this matter.

Poland

Jacek Kucharczyk, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw

Polish views on bilateral relations with the United States have evolved dramatically since 2003, when the entire political establishment rallied behind the decision to support the war in Iraq. Today, the left (divided and politically marginalized) is very critical of Poland's stance toward the United States, a sentiment which includes strong opposition to the placement of the NMD system on Polish soil. President Lech Kaczyński and the Law and Justice party (PiS), led

by the president's brother Jarosław Kaczyński, remain staunchly trans-Atlanticist in orientation (although it remains to be seen how their position will evolve in response to changes in U.S. foreign policy under the Obama administration). The main ruling party, Civic Platform, is generally pro-American, but is also strongly committed to putting Poland within the mainstream of EU policymaking.

These days the priority of the Polish government seems to be the implementation of the provisions of the Declaration on Strategic Cooperation, regardless of whether the Obama administration suspends the installation of the NMD-system components in Poland. In recent months this has been the most debated issue in Polish-American relations. In August 2008 the two sides agreed that in exchange for hosting the missile shield, the Americans would assist in the modernization of Poland's army as well as give Warsaw additional security assurances under the Declaration on Strategic Cooperation.

The shield itself has been a subject of major controversy in Poland. President Kaczyński has been a strong supporter of the installation of the shield as an improvement in Polish security by virtue of the presence of a piece of American military hardware on Poland's soil. In contrast, Prime Minister Donald Tusk sees the shield as a liability which needs to be offset by other forms of assistance.

Another key issue is Afghanistan. The current government supports the Polish military presence there as the fulfillment of Poland's NATO commitment. The left is skeptical, and the right-wing Law and Justice party of the Kaczyńskis is becoming increasingly critical of the Polish military presence there. This may be an early sign that the Kaczyńskis, who were very pro-American under former-President Bush, could temper their Atlanticism under Obama.

There are also strong concerns in Poland with regard to the course of American policy toward Russia. In April 2009 U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden called for a "reset" in U.S.-Russian relations. The implications of this "reset" policy toward Moscow are viewed with concern in Poland. The supporters of the installation of the shield (e.g., President Kaczyński) worry that the United States could "sacrifice" Polish interests on the altar of improved relations with Russia by abandoning the shield project in exchange for Russia's help in stopping the Iranian nuclear program.

Another concern is that Russia will be given a free hand in the realm of the former Soviet Union. The big question is how far the Obama administration is willing to go in order to secure Russia's cooperation in tackling global issues, such as nuclear proliferation. While recognizing the necessity for Western cooperation with Russia on the aforementioned issues, the Polish government would like to see such cooperation balanced by a more assertive Western policy toward Russia to counter threats to the sovereignty of some Eastern European countries (Georgia) or energy blackmail toward others (Ukraine).

Poland remains a serious contributor to the war on terror. Currently 1,200 Polish troops participate in combat missions in Afghanistan within the framework of the NATO International Security Assistance Force. Warsaw remains a staunch supporter of NATO and is willing to contribute to out-of-area missions such as Afghanistan. However, Poland would also like to see NATO balancing such global commitments with its more traditional “in-area” responsibilities such as the defense of NATO member states.

Poland can also contribute to U.S. foreign policy objectives toward the former-Soviet area, where it has an extensive network of government and civil-society connections. Warsaw is seriously committed (partially financially) to promoting democratic and economic reforms in this part of the world. It has proved effective in shaping EU policies toward this region by launching (together with Sweden) the Eastern Partnership project, which was subsequently adopted by key EU institutions (the council and the commission). The project aims to develop strong political and economic ties between the EU and six former Soviet republics and thus to bring them closer to the West.

Thus, while Poland expects much of the United States, it is prepared to do much in return.

Slovakia

Marián Belko, International Institute of Political Science, Brno

Bilateral relations between the Slovak Republic and the United States have always been determined by a combination of the role America plays in the wider international system and the way Slovakia defines its foreign policy priorities. For Bratislava, membership in NATO and catching up with other Visegrád Group countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary) once again became top priorities at the beginning of the Bush administration.

The ideological proximity of the former governments of both countries (the Bush administration on one side and the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda on the other) and a similar approach toward the most significant issues on the international agenda were important factors contributing to the reinforcement of mutual relations. The Slovak Republic acted on many occasions as an active supporter of the United States and its foreign policy (e.g., interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the war on terror) and kept disagreements to a minimum (for example, the issuance of U.S. visas to Slovak citizens).

This almost idyllic situation started to change after the 2006 Slovak parliamentary elections, when Robert Fico and his victorious social-democratic political movement (SMER-SD) formed a new government. The United States

was still perceived as the main strategic partner and the most important actor in international relations; however, an active endorsement of the United States and its policies faded away amid criticism of the United States from Prime Minister Fico. The practical manifestations of Fico's approach could be seen in an accelerated withdrawal of the Slovak military contingent from Iraq, a shift toward warmer relations with Russia and in more negative attitudes toward U.S. plans to station portions of the NMD system in Europe (stationing radar in the Czech Republic and deploying interceptors in Poland).

On the other hand, Slovakia has cautiously avoided serious disagreements with the United States, trying to make the best of a (good) relationship. As the former Slovak Ambassador to the United States has said, despite being publicly critical of the United States, Prime Minister Fico actually acted more pro-American than the former government would have ever dared.

It is not unreasonable to expect that the inauguration of the new U.S. president may provide a chance for closer ties between the two countries. During the U.S. presidential campaign, Prime Minister Fico, along with other Slovak political leaders and most Slovakian political parties supported Barack Obama for the presidency.

Regarding bilateral relations, Obama's approach to certain global challenges is crucial. The Slovak Republic is an example of a small country where the future is dominantly influenced by external factors and interdependence with other international actors. Taking into account its relative exposure, the country is sensitive to any developments in the international arena.

The Slovak government, for example, has to pay more attention to the energy-security issue. Recent developments have shown the vulnerability of the Slovak Republic when it comes to energy security (which is a consequence of an extreme dependence on natural gas supplies from Russia). With this in mind, Slovakia will welcome American policies that aimed at stabilizing global energy markets and securing energy supplies over the long term. The Slovak Republic will in this sense promote any improvement in American-Russian relations if such a change will result in more-responsible Russian behavior toward the West. Bilateral relations with the United States are, of course, only a complementary channel when addressing this problem.

The second problem worth mentioning is the ongoing fight against terrorism. Though this threat touches Slovakia only marginally, at the regional level it is more problematic due to potential threats coming out of the (unstable) Balkans. Of course, any efforts to minimize these risks in the future are welcome.

The third important issue for the Slovak government is an improvement of trans-Atlantic dialogue and partnership. The Obama administration should increase

communication with its European partners, despite differing views on the Iraq War or the Middle Eastern conflict. Fico will surely welcome a redefinition of the American NMD program, as he and his supporters have already displayed their disapproval.

Though Slovakia has minimal capabilities to defend its interests by unilateral action and must rely on multilateral diplomacy and action, it brings much to the table. The synergic effect of international organizations allows Bratislava to concentrate on a select set of issues where it has comparative advantages, instead of taking on several burdens unilaterally.

The success of Slovakia in the international arena therefore rests in its unique abilities and experiences. This is palpable especially in the security aspects of NATO membership, which, combined with other factors, enabled the transformation of the Slovak military forces. This in turn has resulted in a smaller but more professional army capable of more effective participation in foreign operations. The added value of a Slovak contribution can be found particularly in mechanized units, support units, mine clearing and military police.

It is also important to mention that the Slovak Republic went through a process of political transformation from which much was learned. In turn, the lessons of the Slovakian transformation could be useful to other countries, which could face similar challenges. Ukraine is an example of a country where Slovakian knowledge could be applied to fostering democratization.

Last but not least, Slovakia is a partner that could be useful in facilitating contact and communication with the Balkan states. This region is, in the long-term perspective, one of the main concerns of Slovak foreign policy. For instance, Slovakia maintains special relations with the Serbian government. The importance of Slovak capabilities was made clear by the international community in the appointment of Slovak diplomats to fulfill special missions for the international community (former Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Kukan was the UN secretary-general's special envoy for the Balkans from 1999 to 2001 and the current foreign minister, Miroslav Lajčák, has been the high representative and EU special representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina from July 2007 to the present).

The Baltic States

Estonia

Vahur Made, Estonian School of Diplomacy, Tallinn

Historically, Estonia has had good relations with all U.S. administrations, and this was the case with the Bush administration. During that presidency Estonia received an invitation to join NATO – the single greatest diplomatic achievement in Estonia’s post-1991 history – and also hosted a U.S. presidential visit for the first time in the 87-year history of official U.S.-Estonian relations.

Therefore it is not surprising that Tallinn was never critical of the Bush administration’s foreign policy. Nevertheless, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 was seen even in Estonia as a violation of international law, and the subsequent decline of American international prestige has been observed with concern.

The years of the Bush administration witnessed the emergence of the two main formats of U.S.-Estonian cooperation: the joint military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the close cooperation and communication between Estonian and U.S. ambassadors at NATO. This has been a promising start, but there is definitely room for further development of the relationship.

Estonia hopes to retain – and even increase – the existing level of trust and cooperation with the Obama administration. And that includes the need to point out the existing problems on the international agenda where, to Estonia, U.S. involvement is essential.

Unfortunately, the Bush era was marked by friction in U.S.-European relations. The United States directed its attention away from Europe and toward the Middle East and East Asia. Not only did America’s relationships with France and Germany suffer, but there was even a backlash in U.S.-Nordic relations. Though the deteriorating state of affairs in European politics was recognized in the waning days of the Bush administration and shifts were made to address these realities, evidently these changes were too late.

Simultaneously, dangerous developments have taken place in Russia that impact the whole of Europe. Tallinn has watched with growing apprehension as the tone in European politics has become more and more accepting of Russian authoritarianism, Russia’s proposals for establishing a “new European security order” and, recently, Russia’s conclusion of a new international energy charter. Russia is not acting on its interests. Rather, it is acting on its ambition to fundamentally change the existing European security order; to marginalize

NATO, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe; and to push the United States out of European politics.

From Estonia's perspective, this is an issue of the utmost concern and one which must be tackled by the Obama administration. While restarting the American partnership with Russia, President Obama must make very clear to Moscow, and perhaps to several European capitals, that the post-1991 European security order is not a bargaining chip.

To Estonia, the United States needs to more emphatically express its support for European institutions – particularly NATO. NATO has proved to be the strongest guarantor of security and stability in Europe since the Cold War – particularly in the Baltic and Northern European regions. From an Estonian perspective, the August 2008 Russia-Georgia War reinforced the importance of that role. Russia's eagerness to invest in a buildup of its military and to pursue aggressive policies, instead of socioeconomic restructuring and improvement, were clearly displayed during the conflict.

In this light, Estonia would welcome and support the increase of NATO's real and concrete military presence on its soil. Both an expansion of permanent NATO military installations and an increase in support for Estonia's own military forces will receive a great deal of domestic support.

Estonia continues to support the enlargement of NATO. Georgia, where popular support for NATO membership is overwhelming, should be given a fast track, but such a path should not be tied to Ukraine's domestic problems or Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The United States can also support Finland's and Sweden's increasingly favorable attitudes towards their possible future NATO accession.

Currently, American and NATO forces are being tested in Afghanistan. Estonia sees its military commitment to that country increasing. If necessary, Tallinn is also prepared to assist in resolving the current problems faced by Pakistan – which are themselves closely intertwined with the war in Afghanistan.

Estonia welcomes stronger partnership between the United States and the European Union – and it is in U.S.-EU negotiations that Estonia can represent many of the same policy stances of the United States. Estonia would also like to see trans-Atlantic relations become more integrated. Bringing the movement of individuals between the EU and the United States to a level of freedom similar to the Schengen agreement (which allowed for unrestricted intrastate travel between participating EU countries), or even U.S. accession to that agreement, could be one long-term goal for trans-Atlantic integration.

Estonia considers the stability and continuation of the current European security order essential to its national security, and, in that way, positive developments in U.S.-Russian relations are welcomed, particularly when they bring solutions to existing conflicts. Therefore Estonia is ready to offer the United States its knowledge and understanding of Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and other parts of the former-Soviet space in order to help bring the positive outcomes of the U.S.-Russian rapprochement to the intra-EU discussions and to utilize them in North European politics.

Latvia

Dace Akule, Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS, Riga

Relations between Latvia and the United States during the Bush administration can be characterized as very positive – without any major hiccups and with an intensifying character and many highlights. Among them is Bush’s decision, during the 2002 NATO summit in Prague, to invite Latvia to join NATO; his historic visit to Riga – just before his visit to Moscow – on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, when he angered Russia by saying that the Soviet Union had occupied the Baltic States; the speech by then-Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga in 2006 at the joint session of Congress; the decision to include Latvia in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program in November 2008. This long awaited gift, coming as it did on the 90th anniversary of Latvia’s first independence, met with even louder applause than the formal (and unanimous) passage of the U.S. Senate’s resolution congratulating Latvia on the occasion.

In recent years, Latvia has been a firm supporter of U.S. policy in Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, in February 2003 President Vīķe-Freiberga was one of the first international leaders to support Bush’s decision to invade Iraq,² yielding unflattering comments about the hurry of “new Europeans” to support the United States before even checking the position of “old Europeans” on the issue.³ As of 2003, Latvia has taken part in the Afghan and Iraqi missions, with a decrease of 120 soldiers from Iraq in 2007 but an increase from 35 to 160 in Afghanistan in the same year. This strategy is in line with the conclusions of the 2006 NATO summit in Riga that “contribution to peace and stability in Afghanistan [is] NATO’s key priority,” which also reflects the strategy of President Obama to increase troop levels there. Currently Riga is also competing against other port cities in the region to provide transit-cargo services to Afghanistan for the U.S. army, following the expected decision from Kyrgyzstan

² “The Price of Freedom,” Charles W. Larson, Jr., from *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner*, ed. Daunis Auers (Riga: Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2008).

³ The infamous comment of Jacques Chirac, France’s then-president, in February 2003 was that by supporting the United States, East Europeans had “lost a good opportunity to keep quiet.”

to close the U.S. air base on its soil. In general, as a relatively new NATO member grateful for American support, and seeing Washington as the only security guarantee for the country, Latvia has voiced concerns over any proposals to strengthen European security and defense policy that would entail a weakening of NATO's role in even the slightest way. Instead, Latvia wants more EU-NATO cooperation, an increase in the role of NATO in world affairs and to offer its support in greater U.S.-EU strategic dialogue on security.

The only serious glitch in bilateral relations was Riga's stance on the International Criminal Court, where Latvia sided with the European Union and against the United States. Latvia and other countries that had not joined NATO were "awarded" for their position with a severance of American military aid, a resolution which was luckily lifted before it could enter into force in the next fiscal year.⁴ Another disagreement came with the Kyoto Protocol on which Latvia also sided with the European Union, expecting, and eventually seeing, a concession from Washington on American climate-change policies, which in turn will be further enforced by the Obama administration. A commitment to policies as simple as the support for better home insulation could well become a ticket for helping not only the environment but also the economies of the United States and Latvia.

Apart from climate-change policies and security issues like the mission in Afghanistan, one key issue on the trans-Atlantic agenda for Latvia is the outlook toward Europe's eastern neighbors – especially Latvia's favorites: Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Balkan countries. In the East, Latvia sees the need for the United States, NATO and the EU to play a leading role in securing freedom and security in these young democracies that want to join international organizations – especially since the Russian-Georgian conflict of August 2008. In particular, Latvia wants to see Membership Action Plans offered to Georgia and Ukraine as preparation for entrance into NATO. Such a move, Riga believes, would help bring stability to the region and prevent the escalation of new conflicts between Russia and its neighbors. Latvia is ready to share its knowledge of transition policies and regional cooperation, as well as its experience in dealing with Russia.

Latvia would also like to see a more coordinated U.S.-EU position on relations with Russia, including in areas like energy security. This is a particular concern for Latvia due to its dependence on Russian energy and because of the isolation of the Baltic electricity market from the rest of Europe.⁵ Riga sees the United

⁴ "U.S. Policy Toward the Baltic States During Three Presidencies: An Essay," Atis Lejiņš, from *Latvia and the USA: From Captive Nation to Strategic Partner* (Daunis Auers, ed.) University of Latvia Press, 2009.

⁵ Currently only about 30 percent of energy used in Latvia is produced domestically, with 70 percent being imported from Russia, Estonia and Lithuania.

States as a serious partner in looking for ways to diversify the supply of energy to the European Union and developing alternative energy sources.

Overall, one could expect U.S.-Latvian relations to lose some of their intensity in the years to come for several reasons. First, Latvia's EU and NATO membership is likely to lead to a phase of normality in bilateral relations, which will be strengthened by the fact that the current Latvian president, Valdis Zatlers, is more interested in domestic politics than his predecessor, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, who was foreign-policy oriented and focused almost explicitly on strengthening ties with the United States. Second, the current economic crisis has hit Latvia particularly hard, resulting in drastic public-spending cuts, the resignation of the government and the need to focus attention on internal politics and policies.⁶ However, this will not change the foundation of Latvia's foreign policy that sees the United States as Latvia's strategic partner. Moreover, it could intensify Latvia's call for closer economic relations, facilitated by the Visa Waiver Program and the Transatlantic Economic Council, which would strengthen existing ties and establish new initiatives for trans-Atlantic economic integration.

Lithuania

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Lithuanian relations with the United States can be described as close and enduring. Since the restoration of Lithuanian independence, diplomatic contacts between Vilnius and Washington have been intensive at both the highest and lowest levels. Support from the Clinton and Bush administrations was essential in consolidating Lithuania's independence, integrating the country into Euro-Atlantic structures, reforming its defense sector and developing relations with Lithuania's eastern neighbors. The security guarantees provided by the United States through NATO have been of vital importance in strengthening Lithuania's sovereignty and statehood. Economic relations between the two countries have been as important as financial aid, and U.S. foreign investment has helped alleviate Lithuania's dependence on the East.

In response to American support, Lithuania has been an active promoter of U.S. policies and has been seen as a staunch Atlanticist in the European context. Vilnius supported Washington and made efforts to retain U.S. influence in the

⁶ Though Latvia is one of the EU's poorest member states, since 2000 its economy has grown at an average rate of more than 9 percent a year. But this GDP increase was largely dependent on a "real estate bubble," a temporary willingness of foreign-owned banks to grant loans to fuel the economy, and pay hikes steeper than productivity increases. When the flow of global capital stopped, Latvia had to ask for a €7.5 million loan from the international community (the IMF, the European Commission, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Nordic countries, the Czech Republic, Poland and Estonia).

European Union and other international organizations, such as NATO, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Since 1994 Lithuania has participated in all major EU- and NATO-led crisis-management operations. Vilnius has contributed to American-led efforts to establish peace and ensure stability in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and it has been a committed supporter of American anti-terror efforts. Lithuania even agreed to send troops to Iraq in 2003, despite protests from EU heavyweights like France and Germany. In areas where Lithuanian and American interests coincided, the two countries effectively coordinated their actions, which can be seen in the spread of democracy and economic reforms to Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Belarus. The memorandum for visa-free travel signed at the end of the Bush presidency exemplifies how the two countries are willing to maintain close relations at both structural and diplomatic levels.

With a new administration in Washington, Vilnius expects a new spark in the trans-Atlantic partnership. Lithuania is interested in seeing more, rather than less, of America in Europe. That means greater American involvement in European political and security affairs, especially with regard to the eastern part of Europe. With the help of Washington, Vilnius might finally establish a constructive dialogue with Russia and Belarus – countries which until recently have not been interested in a closer partnership with the United States or its allies. Vilnius also hopes that Washington will foster a more institutionalized world order as such a shift could increase the structural power of smaller states like Lithuania and better address international tensions. Lithuania remains committed to the eastern enlargement of NATO and the EU, as this would help avoid the creation of special spheres of influence in Europe. Vilnius is especially interested in the Obama administration's pursuit of energy security in the region. Increased cooperation (without preconditions) with Central Asian countries – along with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine – would make alternative energy routes to Europe more likely and more feasible.

The issues surrounding hard security should be emphasized as Lithuania is greatly interested in the effectiveness of NATO, the strengthening of the political and defense structures of the alliance, and the development of European security and defense capabilities. In other words, Lithuania would like to see tangible collective-defense guarantees. This is due to the “lesson learned” in Eastern Europe, where smaller states have not been able to confront their giant of a neighbor – a neighbor willing to change the status quo of territorial boundaries by the use of force. That is why Lithuania will do everything in its capacity to sustain the necessary military spending for the development of expeditionary capabilities, to maintain a presence in Afghanistan and to participate in other international peace-enforcement missions. Lithuania will also push for an effective European security system, in which NATO would play a central role and the European Security and Defence Policy would complement and

strengthen but not duplicate the initiatives of the alliance. On the domestic front, Vilnius expects Washington's support in efforts to strengthen the Lithuanian national-defense system, as well as the preparation of a feasible plan for the collective defense of Lithuania.

The United States can expect full support from Lithuania in efforts to achieve common foreign- and security-policy goals. Since an alliance with Europe is essential to Washington's global influence, the United States can count on Lithuania's efforts to foster trans-Atlantic unity and keep the EU close to Washington. Vilnius can also use its presence in organizations such as the EU, NATO or the OSCE to support various U.S. initiatives. This is especially relevant since Lithuania will be chairing the OSCE in 2011 and the EU in 2013. Furthermore, Lithuania can offer extensive intelligence, knowledge and experience on relations with Eastern Europe. In the long term Washington can also profit from Vilnius' close connections with Tbilisi and Kiev along with governmental and nongovernmental bodies in Belarus and other neighboring countries.

The Balkans

Bulgaria

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The U.S.-Bulgarian relationship has made great progress in the period since the end of communism. In less than twenty years the two former Cold War enemies became strategic partners, allies and close friends. In Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001 and later) and Iraq (from 2003 on) the two countries worked together, fighting against dictators, oppressive regimes and terrorists. U.S. support for Bulgaria's bid for NATO membership and, more recently, for the liberation of our medics in Libya will be remembered by Bulgarians for quite some time. Today we work together to energize U.S.-Bulgarian military cooperation, particularly at the four joint military facilities in south Bulgaria.

Apart from the United States being a model of a free and democratic nation for Bulgarians, in less than two decades Washington's relationship with Sofia showed how a small country could preserve its sovereignty and dignity in a close relationship with a very powerful state. The United States pushed for a strong and capable Bulgaria as a means of gaining a strong ally, a strong and stable Southeast Europe, and a strong Europe. The unprecedented respect demonstrated by a superpower toward Bulgaria created a stimulus for domestic change and political progress. Much room is left, however, for intensifying bilateral trade and economic relations.

Bulgaria's hope and expectation is that the Obama administration and the U.S. economy will pioneer the way out of the current global economic and financial crisis. Bulgarians would like to have a U.S. administration engaged – together with NATO and a proactive EU – with the “unfinished business” in the western Balkans. The belated modernization of Southeast Europe's economy, infrastructure and political culture are also still problems. Bulgaria badly needs U.S. support in improving the technology necessary for ecologically friendly energy production in Bulgaria, but also for protecting key domestic infrastructure systems. U.S. cooperation in modernizing the Bulgarian military and adapting it to NATO standards is a lasting need and interest for Bulgaria. A continued academic-exchange program – both for members of the military and civilians – is a Bulgarian expectation from any U.S. administration.

The top priority for the coming years (and probably decades), however, is U.S. involvement in tackling a broad spectrum of issues found at the intersection of the east-west and north-south strategic corridors – an area stretching from the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea to the western coast of the Black Sea. This issue

has a high priority for two reasons. First, there is a persisting knot of security problems: terrorism; energy flows; undemocratic and badly governed states; an increasingly assertive nuclear Iran; a politically erratic Russia; a Turkey ambitious to join the EU while still facing major road blocks and domestic deficiencies in its bid for accession; the network of routes for drugs, human beings and arms; and weapons of mass destruction, to name several. And, second, this is an excellent opportunity to boost existing overlapping U.S.-Bulgarian interests, stemming from the need to develop the east-west (the "Silk Road") and the north-south (Scandinavia to the Persian Gulf and India) strategic corridors. The constructive solution to the multitude of conflicting and shared interests would be a historic mark of success for the new U.S. administration.

There is a well-designed U.S.-Bulgarian bilateral agenda in the areas of security, trade, visa reciprocity and U.S.-EU relations, and there are motivated experts working out the kinks in these areas. Bulgaria is ready, however, to work together with the United States on some of the global challenges that make us even more interdependent:

- First and foremost, in the war on terror: both on an operational level as well as on social, political, cultural and diplomatic levels. This would require, among other things, continued support for the democratic process in Iraq and the provision of education programs for Iraqis in Bulgarian universities.
- Second, in the fight for a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan. Bulgaria's involvement together with NATO and the EU in Afghanistan is a practical demonstration of trans-Atlantic solidarity.
- Third, in the effort to turn the knot of contradictions in the Black Sea-Caspian Sea area into a field of opportunities for success, including engagement with Russia.
- Fourth, in completing the job of integrating the whole of the Balkans into NATO and the European Union.
- Fifth, in diversifying the hydrocarbon-energy sources and routes from the East to Europe and thus depoliticizing the delivery of energy to Europe.
- And, sixth, in providing a stable source of electricity to all of Southeast Europe by further modernization of the country's network of nuclear plants.

2009 is an election year in Bulgaria, both for a new national parliament and for representatives to the European Parliament. It is another opportunity to deal a decisive blow to major vices of the country's developing democracy - corruption,

organized crime, deficiencies in the rule of law. It is also a chance to give an added political impetus to the progressing U.S.-Bulgarian relationship.

Romania

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Before the 2002 NATO Summit in Prague, Romania was eager to transform its strategic partnership with the United States – launched in 1997 – into a formal alliance within NATO. Even as a candidate for EU membership, Romania agreed to be at odds with the European Union by signing an agreement in 2002 granting immunity from International Criminal Court-issued arrest warrants to U.S. nationals on Romanian soil. In the post-Prague era, Romania has become an active contributor to the American-led war on terror, contributing troops to military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the whole, Romanian-American relations have focused on the security agenda, with only a minor role given to economic ties (to the disappointment of many Romanians). The most important achievement in Romanian-American economic relations has not been a strategic investment, but rather the contract for the construction of the Transylvania highway by Bechtel. Yet, its onerous clauses, the huge amount of money paid to Bechtel and the slow advance of the motorway construction could not but fuel rumors that the contract with Bechtel was the “price” of Romania’s accession into NATO.

President George W. Bush’s second term superimposed itself over the change of power in Bucharest. The “Washington-London-Bucharest Axis” formula, launched by President Traian Băsescu at the beginning of his term was both a pointless gesture (strategic partnerships had already been agreed to with Washington and London) and an unfortunate one – not only because of the bad historical connotations of the “axis” concept but also because it was launched without prior consultations with Britain or the United States.

After 2004, Romania actively supported the U.S. security agenda in the Black Sea Region (BSR), but it did not understand that the region has only a peripheral role in America’s grand strategy for the Greater Middle East. Overestimating the importance of the BSR to the United States, Romania launched a series of initiatives in the region (e.g., the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership), but they inevitably failed because U.S. involvement fell short of what was expected and, in some instances, they contrasted with the EU approach because the initiatives couldn’t attract the necessary resources.

Since the middle of President Bush's second term, the bilateral relationship started to be influenced by the Romanian domestic political agenda and a more careful consideration of the Turkish factor in the region.

With all of this in mind, the American recognition of Kosovo's statehood was basically the only issue in which Romania's position diverged from that of the United States. However, there have been other, informal friction points in the bilateral relationship. One is the visa issue. Romanians cannot understand why Romanian soldiers may fight alongside Americans in Afghanistan and Iraq, and yet they don't get the same immigration rights as other EU citizens.

Another factor which has had a significant negative impact on Romanian public opinion has been the way U.S. authorities have handled automobile accidents caused by U.S. embassy staff in Bucharest. The fact that a U.S. military court decided that U.S. Marine Staff Sergeant Christopher Van Goethem was not guilty of manslaughter when he rammed his SUV into a taxi in December 2004 – killing the Romanian rock star Teo Peter – not only shocked the Romanian public but also contributed to a growing feeling of a double standard in the relations between the two countries. The negative public sentiment was fuelled further three years later in December 2007. In this incident, the deputy attaché and U.S. Secret Service representative at the U.S. embassy, Kevin Lloyd Sandlin – himself the cause of other auto accidents – refused to take an alcohol test, just like Van Goethem three years before. What had previously seemed to be an isolated incident was becoming a pattern.

Leaving behind what has by now become history, Romania, as a member of the European Union, would like the Obama administration to focus on: the reinstatement of traditional American moral values in U.S. leadership and the corporate world; the restoration of America's capacity to exercise effective leadership in world affairs; listening to rational calls for U.S. military retrenchment and strategic restraint; setting up prudent rules meant to revitalize the banking system; fostering financial-stimulus measures intended to minimize the current crisis; reversing the measures which have led to restrictions of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the context of the "war on terror"; developing a low-carbon economy and open and intense involvement in post-Kyoto negotiations; strong security and defense cooperation with the European Union based on the principle of à la carte multilateralism; a common vision with the European Union for settling unresolved conflicts in the BSR; revitalizing trans-Atlantic partnerships by putting them on fair foundations; and standardizing the rules for entry into the United States for all EU citizens.

Romania will continue to be an active advocate of U.S. interests in the region. It will maintain its military commitment in Afghanistan and Iraq and it will participate, if asked, in regional efforts to stabilize the Greater Middle East

through traditional diplomatic measures both with Arab states and with Israel. It is also possible that Romania will launch a framework for enhanced dialogue with Turkey in a quadrilateral format (involving Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and the United States) based on common ties to NATO to tackle the sensitivities of Turkish political leaders in a constructive and open manner.

Slovenia

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Relations with the United States are perceived by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as sharply divided into what it sees as strictly bilateral relations on one hand and what are understood to be part of trans-Atlantic relations and the United States' and European Union's global policy on the other. Bilateral ties – which include economic relations (specifically foreign direct investment), cultural links and cooperation in education and small-scale foreign-policy projects (such as cooperation within the International Trust Fund for Demining and Humanitarian Assistance) – are seen as stable and unaffected by changes in leadership in either country. Though there have been periods of disagreement, relations between the two countries are largely considered to be on solid ground and stable.

However, U.S.-Slovenian relations cover just a small portion of Ljubljana's foreign-policy priorities – priorities which are being pursued and shaped within the framework of the EU's foreign policy. And it is here that the MFA – along with policymakers and the media – sees a discrepancy between the United States and the European Union in their views of the current global threats. As a result of this difference, the list of possible areas of agreement between the EU and the United States shrank during the Bush administration. Rather than divisions over specific policies, there is a larger structural difference brought about by changes in the global environment as well as by the Bush administration's responses to them.

While the media and policymakers are largely focused on specific issues such as the closing of the prison at Guantanamo Bay and the removal of American troops from Iraq, the Slovenian government considers the renewal of trans-Atlantic relations and the search for common ground between the European Union and the United States – so that the most pressing global political and economic problems can be effectively addressed – to be of the utmost importance for the Obama administration. The Slovenian government advocates a common approach to tackling global issues such as energy security, climate change and the economy. There are also other items on the agenda that are often shortlisted,

such as the Middle East, including Iran and Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and relations with Russia. The strengthening of economic cooperation between the European Union and the United States is also seen as essential, especially in view of the current global financial crisis. Economic relations are considered to hold the most weight in U.S.-EU relations, but increased liberalization could increase competitiveness, which in turn would be advantageous for both actors.

Though not the most pressing global issue, it needs to be mentioned that the Slovenian government sees the American presence in the Western Balkans as crucial to the stability and security of the region, which is Slovenia's primary foreign policy and security concern. This presence need not be specifically defined, e.g., in terms of troop levels; rather, it can merely be a symbolic presence coupled with greater overall attention to the region.

The Slovenian government believes that it is of the utmost importance for the EU to show itself a credible partner to the United States. In this respect Slovenia believes that symbolic support for U.S. global policy is needed, along with concrete steps toward increasing Slovenian capabilities in tackling the most pressing problems.

Accepting prisoners from Guantanamo is one of those symbolic ways to support the United States. But such a decision is subject to complex domestic policymaking (and overcoming interministerial disagreements), but there is an understanding within the MFA that Slovenia's acceptance of a certain number of prisoners would represent a valuable first step.

Slovenia is more reserved in terms of increasing the number of its own soldiers deployed abroad in support of U.S. missions. It sees its deployments as most useful and effective in the western Balkans. On the other hand, Slovenia is prepared to engage in robust post-conflict and peace-building operations, such as through an increase in its police and judicial personnel posted in conflict zones - especially Afghanistan.

In terms of U.S.-EU and broader trans-Atlantic relations, Slovenia can contribute through support of a more intensive strategic dialogue. It sees the institutionalization of these relationships as essential and supports setting up a body of senior officials, which would plan, prepare and monitor the implementation of decisions taken at summits. Slovenia also advocates a two-track priority set - short- and middle-ranged - to overcome deadlocks within the Trans-Atlantic Economic Council as well as the European Commission's efforts to keep increased economic cooperation with the United States high on the EU's agenda.

Other Perspectives

European Union

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Since the big bang enlargement of the EU in 2004 – when eight Central and Eastern European countries joined the European Union – a new chapter began for Europe. For many of the new accession countries, entering the European Union was not a purely political maneuver; rather, it symbolized a deeper civilizational choice to be part of the West. And becoming “Western” was never easy – many of the newer members experienced costly transformations in the 1990s and 2000s. Yet joining the EU did not yield as much as Euro-enthusiasts would have liked; nor did it prove as devastating as the Euro-skeptics had predicted. However, the biggest challenge since 2004 has been to overcome the prevailing divide between “us” and “them,” which seems to exist strongly among both the older and the newer members. That is to say, the older EU-15 societies seem to perceive each other to be on the same boat, while the newer states are on a different vessel. The debate in early 2009 about the economic downturn in Europe illustrated this fissure. Nevertheless, the same can be said of the newer members: most of the Central European crowd stick together and almost never reach out to Western European nations without consulting their regional brethren first.

The East-West divide within the EU has to be treated in a historical context. It is not easy to overcome decades of differences and a lack of knowledge about “the others.” The societies and political leadership of the East did not experience the same processes as their counterparts in the West. The developments of 1968 (the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia) led to wholly different changes in what were then Communist countries than the liberating movements in Western capitals, which largely brought about the current political structures of the Western nations.

Yet the process of overcoming those differences has begun. As recently as the first half of 2009 it is still difficult to say whether the process has been completed; nevertheless, it is clearly underway. And in this transition almost all new member states have undergone some kind of “reality check,” as almost all of them have proved “difficult” at one stage or another: Poland had the leadership of the Kaczyński brothers, the Czech Republic has Václav Klaus, Latvia had its 2008-09 political crisis, Estonia had its monument conflict with Russia and Lithuania had its anti-Russian vetoes. And then there has been the coalition government in Slovakia of Robert Fico, the electoral lies and instability in Hungary under Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, the Slovenian border dispute

with Croatia, and last but not least, the difficulties that Romania and Bulgaria have experienced since accession with the rule of law, transparency and corruption.

There is no one explanation of why these difficulties occurred in the East. To some, the post-2004 troubles proved that enlargement was a mistake and, as suspected, “they” are not “us.” Yet, the silent majority recognizes that these developments are natural – after all, problems and challenges occur almost every day in any democratic society. The real test is for each of those states to show how it deals with a crisis once one arises. The new difficulty is the scale – it is quite challenging to follow the progress of all 27 member states and any one problem can have a huge impact on the European project.

Finally, there is a broader problem with management of the EU. There are very few political leaders who can steer the entire European Union. This is exemplified in the EU presidencies of France’s Nicolas Sarkozy and Slovenia’s Janez Janša in 2008. Janša was weak, unconvincing, and only sought the lowest common denominator (if even that). In contrast, Sarkozy’s term was all about Europe. Sure, it was a Francophone Europe, but he still proposed a comprehensive vision and sought to implement it. And though he failed on many occasions (as not many share his views), he nevertheless tried to speak as a European statesman – one who just happened to be French. By contrast, Janša was a Slovenian who happened to chair international meetings.

This dividing line is not geographic – the management of the European Union can be taken up by some new member states, too. Proof of the changing times and of the acceptance of a leadership role by new EU members can be seen in the fact that the next president of the European Parliament will likely come from one of those states.

There is no real policy overlap between the United States and the EU towards Central Europe. Central Europe is in the EU and this very fact defines the role played by the United States in the region and in the integration process of new members. The approach of the United States is largely benign – that is to say it helps Central and Eastern European nations in the EU integration process. And simultaneously many of those same states promote a more pro-U.S. policy for the entire EU than other members regarding such controversial areas as Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is no single clear-cut conflict between Brussels and Washington over Central Europe. But if there was one, Washington would lose quickly. Even the most controversial subject – relations with Russia – is not that divisive, as Central European nations avoid confrontation with their Western partners (be they in Brussels or in Washington) and seem to largely understand that in order to be

effective they need to have the backing of both the United States and the 27 members of the EU.

There is no unified view in the European Union for what it hopes to see in the Obama administration's policies toward the EU's eastern members. There is a predominant expectation that the United States will treat the European Union as a single entity with all its complex internal structures, shedding the Rumsfeldian policy of divide and conquer, playing the interests of separate members against each other.

For its part, it is important for the United States to recognize the real political consequences of the hard fact that Central European nations are in the EU. These states are no longer poor; they do not need financial support and, when they do, the United States cannot match EU funding. The states of Central Europe coordinate their policies with other European nations through thousands of meetings every year, and each time their positions, their interests, their views are taken into account. The few meetings each year between American and Czech or American and Romanian diplomats cannot match the intensity of the intra-European exchange.

The bottom line is simple: For Central Europe, affairs with the European Union are domestic and internal; with the United States they are foreign and external.

Germany

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Germany's overarching interest toward the states of East-Central Europe is to see them develop as stable, prosperous and predictable partners in the European Union. After the eastern enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007, this meant shifting the countries from simply formal to effective full members by overcoming the side effects of the accession process, political reforms and economic adaptation.

This interest reflects the profound Europeanization of Germany's relations with its "near abroad" in East-Central Europe, which has taken place since the second half of the 1990s, when the enlargement process was actually initiated. One effect of this was that after 1989-1990 Germany never developed a coherent strategy for this region; there has been no specific German "Ostmitteleuropapolitik." Rather, Germany's approach toward its eastern neighborhood was to support EU (and NATO) enlargement and to try to cultivate relations with the most important countries of the region, e.g., Poland and to some extent the Czech Republic and Hungary.

As a result of the 2004 and 2007 enlargement rounds, German-Central European cooperation is embedded in the multilateral framework of the European community, which shapes and limits a huge part of political and economic contacts between both sides. This is not to deny the ongoing relevance of bilateral relations. Especially with its direct neighbors, Poland and the Czech Republic, Germany has a broad range of contacts and exchange, but also controversial bilateral issues.

In this context, intensive economic relations play an important role. Poland for example is one of Germany's most important trade partners. With a share of 4 percent of all German exports (in 2008), Poland alone is a far bigger market than the Russian Federation. Many German companies – including carmakers like Volkswagen, energy corporations like the RWE Group and scores of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – have invested billions of euros in the countries of the region. In recent years, more German exports have gone to the Central European member states of the EU than to France, which is the number one destination for German goods.

Energy issues have become a major bone of contention in bilateral relations with Poland and some of the Baltic States. Nordstream, a gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea to be built by German (and other West European) companies and Russia's Gazprom, has been particularly divisive. The pipeline would be a direct connection between Russia and Germany and would bypass transit countries like Poland. Polish officials have accused Germany of disloyalty, calling for more energy solidarity in the European Union.

Conflicts over history – especially World War II and its consequences – have put a strain on Germany's relations with Poland and the Czech Republic. German-Polish relations in particular – which were seen as an example of a successful reconciliation policy after 1989 – have suffered setbacks in recent years. Compensation claims by some Germans who had to leave what is now Poland as well as the call of German expellees' organizations to build an institution in Berlin commemorating the fate of those Germans forced to leave Poland have revived old animosities and revealed a growing divergence of collective memories. Polish politicians, especially those from the national-conservative camp, have blamed Germany for a revisionist portrayal of 20th century history. Intensified by domestic political prominence, disputes rooted in the past have gained the power to undermine bilateral cooperation.

Irrespective of these bilateral specifics, the common membership in the European Union will increasingly determine the agenda of Germany and Central European states. From the German point of view especially, the following areas will be of importance:

- *The Economy.* Germany is interested in further economic reforms and sustainable growth in Central European countries. Not only for economic and trade reasons, but also because an economic slowdown might have negative political implications in the countries concerned. Stagnation also means that the prospect of economic convergence is fading away, which means that the socioeconomic gap between Germany and its eastern neighbors will not close as soon as expected.
- *Internal stability.* In many countries of the region, populist forces have gained ground or even won elections. The emergence of Euroskeptic or nationalist parties, or governments dominated by them, and a highly polarized political culture makes the foreign and European policies of the respective countries less stable, less flexible and less calculable. This is why Germany, in its contacts with the countries of the region, is interested to see the consolidation of political actors and parties that firmly stand on a pro-European, pro-market, liberal-democratic platform.
- *Governance and corruption.* In most of the new member states, the public sector still faces huge governance deficiencies – with corruption being a permanent obstacle for the development of an efficient public administration. With the growing influx of money from European-assistance schemes, there is an increased risk of misuse and of funds seeping into dark channels. This is a particularly sensitive issue in Germany, which is one of the big net payers to the EU budget. That is why Germany is pushing for better administrative capacities and better anti-fraud policies in new member states.
- *Russia.* Germany has traditionally followed a line of “pragmatic,” predominantly two-sided, cooperation with Russia. In the EU context, Germany wants to avoid complications with Russia due to bilateral conflicts between Central European states and Russia. This means Germany is interested in an improvement of Polish-Russian or Baltic-Russian relations. If EU-Russian relations are blocked due to new-member vetoes (e.g., after Poland’s rejection of open talks on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia at the end of 2006), Berlin will tend to emphasize its already strong bilateral ties with Moscow.
- *Eastern Europe.* Notwithstanding relations with Russia, Germany has supported Central European countries’ efforts to enhance EU cooperation with Eastern European partners, especially Ukraine. During its EU presidency in the first half of 2007, Germany attempted to upgrade the eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy; after Poland (and Sweden) launched the Eastern Partnership, Germany endorsed this initiative aimed at a more comprehensive EU engagement with the

countries in Eastern Europe and the southern Caucasus. German foreign-policymakers appreciate the expertise and activities of new member states concerning the region between the EU and Russia. Poland in particular is seen as a key partner for moving cooperation with eastern states forward. However, Germany wants to see the Eastern Partnership/ENP not as an instrument of geopolitical containment against Russia. Unlike most of its Central European neighbors, Germany opposes giving Ukraine and other neighbors a NATO membership prospect.

All in all, the German perception of the Central European states and their role in the EU is a miscellany of satisfaction and skepticism. On one hand, the political class and the business community consider enlargement a success story. On the other hand, even before accession actually took place, enlargement fatigue in Germany's society and parts of the European policy establishment began to assert itself. The behavior of Central European countries during the Iraq War and discussions around missile defense seem to have confirmed the instinctive pro-Americanism of the new member states – which in the eyes of many German observers could complicate the emergence of a more coherent European foreign policy. In a similar vein, the troubles of Poland or the Baltic States with Russia made many believe that eastern enlargement has inserted new diversity in the EU's external actions. But the most annoying question for Germany's European policy has been the resistance – or reluctance – of Poland and (to some extent) the Czech Republic to institutional reform. Although old member states like France, the Netherlands and Ireland have been the real obstacles, some of the new members are seen as an impediment for creating a more streamlined decision-making in the European Union.

The rise of new populists (such as the Kaczyński twins in Poland and Robert Fico in Slovakia) after 2004 and the implications of the financial crises in Central Europe – with Hungary, Latvia and Romania almost defaulting – have raised fresh doubts about the stability of the new member states. In spite of these difficulties, in Berlin we are witnessing a growing awareness of how different the countries in the region are. Slovenia and Slovakia have adopted the euro; together with the other countries of the 2004 enlargement round, they joined the Schengen area – with its lifted border controls – in the European Union. Slovenia and the Czech Republic have already reached a per capita GDP that is at the level of some of the poorer old members. Also with regard to foreign policy, there is substantial heterogeneity. Apart from staunch Atlanticists and skeptics toward Russia, quite a number of new member states are not far away from Germany's balanced Euro-Atlanticism and Berlin's pragmatic approach vis-à-vis Moscow. Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia have cooperated smoothly with Russia in energy and other matters.

With the Baltic Tigers crippled by the financial crisis, the two southeastern European states Bulgaria and Romania lagging on reforms, the Czech Republic deeply divided, and Hungary distracted by a daunting public debt, it is again Poland which has emerged as Germany's key interlocutor in the region. As its direct neighbor, the only heavyweight in terms of its size and geopolitical ambitions, Germany wants to lift bilateral relations with Poland to where they stood in the 1990s, when the two countries were united by a "community of interests." However, only the restoration of a pro-European consensus and the downgrading of history-focused policies in Warsaw will lead to a new quality in bilateral relations and make the rapprochement that has taken place between both countries since the 2007 elections sustainable.

Looking at the set of primary German interests in the Central European region, there is considerable congruence with what the United States might want to see. Both the United States and Germany are interested in the emergence of well-governed states, market-oriented economies and predictable governments all over the region. Germany and the United States want the new EU members to play an active and constructive role in Europe's eastern neighborhood. Moreover, contributing to NATO, EU, UN, and other peace and stabilization missions, the new member states have shown that they are important partners and "security producers" for the United States and Germany. Also, the United States has an interest in Central European member states becoming part of all major integration projects and of the EU's political center of gravity – since this is the only way these countries (close allies of the United States) can get influence over European policies. An important element of this is the functioning bilateral relations of Central European states with Germany, which is a key player in the European Union and a natural ally of the countries from the region.

Divisive issues between the United States and Germany affecting Central European countries have been mainly related to security (missile defense), Russia (energy security, the response to Russian activities in its "near abroad") and the post-Soviet space (NATO enlargement). It is these questions and a number of broader European and foreign policy issues where Germany would obviously like to see the initiative of the Obama administration.

- *NATO*. Given the doubts about the state and future of NATO in some of the new member states, it is important that the Obama administration send a clear message that NATO – including the "old," collective-defense alliance – still matters. This would help to assuage Central European insecurities.
- *Russia*. The new U.S. administration should try to convince its Central European partners that an improved U.S.-Russia relationship is not to the detriment of these countries but in their interest. However, to be effective,

this has to be accompanied by a U.S.-Central European dialogue on Washington's goals with regard to Russia and the post-Soviet space.

- *Eastern Europe.* The United States should signal that despite its "new beginning" with Russia and despite less emphasis on NATO enlargement, it will maintain its engagement with East Europe. For the new member states, this would show a continued rejection of the "spheres-of-influence" concept put forward by Russia. From the point of view of Germany, this would improve the chances to advance the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) without triggering new conflicts with Russia. For Germany and Central European states, a case-by-case inclusion of the United States in the European Union's EaP might be positive.
- *European Union.* Germany would appreciate continued U.S. assistance for improving governance in Central European member states. U.S. activities, both official and through NGOs, could be coordinated with EU projects. In a broader political sense, Berlin would certainly be interested in Washington encouraging the new member states to improve or deepen their relations with Germany and to initiate thematic dialogues on EU policies like energy, climate or infrastructure.

Russia

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Dividing "New" and "Old" Europe is one of the strategic goals of Russian policy toward Europe – particularly Central Europe. Its aim is to enfeeble European solidarity and stimulate divisions within the EU and NATO, and to establish its influence upon security-related decision making in "the eastern part of Central Europe." Those are integral elements of Moscow's "grand strategy," which sees a "fragmentation of the West" and a capitalization on discrepancies between the United States, the European Union and other European countries as a principal condition and tool of strengthening Russia's global position.

The Medvedev foreign policy doctrine presumes that the former Soviet-bloc members are within Russia's region of "privileged interests," which consists of countries with which Russia shares "special historical relations," to which it is "bound together as friends and good neighbors" and with which it has "built friendly ties."⁷ All those formulas are used in the Russian political jargon with

⁷ Interview given by Dmitri Medvedev to television channels Channel One, Rossia and NTV.
http://www.president.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82912type82916_206003.shtml.

reference not only to the former Soviet republics but also to the former Soviet-bloc members. It may mean that in the longer term the Visegrád states are seen as an area for Russian geopolitical and economic expansion, or at least as a zone of its influence. Moscow's attempts to prevent the deployment of the third site of the American NMD system – in the Czech Republic and Poland – signal that it wants to legitimize its right to dictate security- and defense-related issues in the former Warsaw Pact area.

This policy also partially stems from the evolution of Russian economic and political systems. The rise of authoritarianism in Russia has been combined with an inability to prevent a decline in labor productivity, high inflation, and the technological and institutional degradation of the economy, the growth of which was only fuelled by soaring oil- and gas-export revenues. If a country like Russia is not able to compete successfully in the international arena due to its inability to modernize its society, economy and technological capabilities, it will use geopolitical means to ensure its economic interests abroad. In this light, Russia's presence in Central Europe is seen by the Kremlin as essential to Russian businesses, particularly the energy sector in the region.

Moscow uses Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas to attain those goals, including the establishment of a "privileged energy relationship" with Germany. Russia tries to control gas downstream in Central European states in an attempt to obtain a tool of political influence over them. In addition, with increasing frequency the Kremlin uses military threats and pressure to divide Central Europe into two zones of different security: the Visegrád area and the rest of the region. This pressure includes destruction of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty regime that is of substantial importance to Central Europe, along with threats to station new Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad and to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, a move which may result in a new missile crisis in Europe.

Russian policy towards Central Europe is a direct challenge to the EU approach to the region as well as to the EU's strategic views and philosophy. The European Union's basic goals include consolidation of the European economic and security spaces, and strengthening European solidarity and the formation of a joint European policy in different policy realms, including energy security. At the same time the EU approach toward Russia is ambiguous and to some extent controversial. Some political, economic and intellectual circles in Europe ignore aspects of Russian policy towards Central Europe (and Europe as a whole) – as outlined earlier – and see Russia as an important partner in assuring energy security, fighting new threats like terrorism, nuclear proliferation, etc. Those circles sacrifice some of the vital interests of the Visegrád states, albeit indirectly, for the highly questionable prospect of cooperation or partnership with Russia in security, including energy security.

As for U.S. policy in Central Europe, Moscow sees a prospect of “resetting” its relationship with America as a chance to strengthen its own influence in Central Europe, especially to stop the implementation of the American missile defense system in the region. The Kremlin welcomed the U.S. initiative, yet it signaled that concessions should be made by Washington, and that the Obama administration should give up missile defense in Europe. If Washington agrees with this Russian demand it will result in a decrease of the reliability of American security guarantees to Europe, especially to the countries of Central Europe. This, in turn, will increase differences between the Visegrád states and Germany, as Berlin – at least a substantial part of German economic and political elites – does not feel itself threatened by Russia. Longer-term results of this shift, including the future of NATO, are hard to predict.

Conclusion

Viewed collectively, the essays above offer a thumbnail sketch of the former captive nations of the Central European region at a watershed moment in their history – twenty years after communism, five (or two) years after EU accession, one year after the declaration of the Medvedev Doctrine and six months after the swearing-in of a new U.S. President.

Several common themes surface across the texts. One is the lingering residue of the Iraq War experience. Central European capitals approach the link with Washington with greater caution than they did in 2003. To varying degrees, Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania show signs of what might be called “ally fatigue.” Significantly, even those states that did not figure prominently in the Iraq War and were not directly involved in negotiations on missile defense came away from the Bush era less enthusiastic about supporting the United States in future endeavors.

A second, related theme is the growing gravitational pull of the EU. This trend is evident in all of the ten states that joined since 2005, irrespective of size, geography or traditional geopolitical orientation. It is true both of those states that tend to track with the foreign-policy priorities of large Western EU member states, like Hungary or Slovakia, as well as of the region’s historically most pro-U.S. powers, like Poland, Romania and the Baltic States.

A third theme is the shrinking utility, from the standpoint of U.S. policymakers, of the term “Central Europe.” Geopolitically, the region is splintering: Some states are anxious about Russia, some are not; some identify themselves as part of a post-communist experience distinct from the rest of Europe, some do not. In this sense, the concept of “New” Europe – of Europe’s newest, post-communist members united in pursuit of a common Atlanticist cause – appears to have been a geopolitical anomaly.

All three themes – a softened ardor for Atlanticism, the centripetal effects of European integration and geopolitical fragmentation – are well documented in the analytical literature. The fact that they show up here is unsurprising. What is surprising is that these themes, particularly the first two, do not show up more strongly. In most of the essays, they are mitigated by other, stronger factors.

One of these is Russia. In the post-Georgia War setting, many regional capitals have developed a sharpened sensitivity to the Russian geopolitical presence. This is especially noticeable in the Baltic States. Vahur Made of the Estonian School of Diplomacy places the challenge from Russia in the strongest terms: “Russia is not acting on its interests,” he writes, but rather, “on its ambition to fundamentally

change the existing European security order; to marginalize NATO, the EU and the OSCE in Europe; and to push the United States out of European politics." He writes that President Obama "must make clear to Moscow, and perhaps to several European capitals, that the post-1991 European security order is not a bargaining chip."

In a similar vein, Jacek Kucharczyk, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw writes that Poland would like to see a "more assertive Western policy towards Russia to counter threats" to the sovereignty of countries like Georgia and acts of "energy blackmail" against Poland's neighbor, Ukraine.

Concern about Russia is not restricted to Poland and the Baltic States. Vít Střílecký of the Institute for International Relations writes that Prague considers Russia "the most pressing political and security issue" on the European agenda. "Central and Eastern European states in general," he writes, "view the current assertive foreign policy of Russia with an uneasiness that tends to be magnified by juxtaposition with the views of other European countries."

Similarly, Tamás Magyarics of ICDT in Budapest reports growing concern in Hungary about Russia's "more assertive economic and political presence in Central Europe" and its efforts to "drive a wedge[s] between countries within the EU and loosen the bonds of the trans-Atlantic relationship."

Most of the texts express concern that the Obama administration will bargain with Moscow over the heads of regional capitals as part of its effort to "reset" U.S.-Russia relations. None but Slovenia believe that the EU is prepared to fill America's shoes as the region's primary security underwriter.

This points to one of the main themes of the paper: Even as the traditional foundations of the U.S.-Central European special relationships have been weakened by post-Iraq War "ally fatigue," the attractiveness of Atlanticism is being bolstered by Russian geopolitical reanimation and the inability of the EU to provide a meaningful alternative to the U.S. security umbrella. The net effect is a kind of bungee effect that places limits on how far the downward slide in regional Atlanticism can go.

As a result, despite signs of unmistakable strain in their countries' relations with the United States, most of the Central European authors register a continued desire for U.S. engagement and leadership in their region. Asked what priorities their capitals would most like to see the new U.S. administration address, almost all (including those from states traditionally seen as least supportive of a U.S. regional role) emphasize the need for the United States to play a more active role in promoting the continued spread of stability and Western institutions into

neighboring regions – Ukraine for the Baltic States, Czech Republic and Poland; the Western Balkans for Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Asked what their countries can offer the new U.S. administration as it confronts an unprecedented international security dilemma, the authors' responses fell into two categories: the *instrumental* benefit that Central European states provide through support for U.S. initiatives and the *intrinsic* value that regional capitals offer the United States through their membership in the EU and existence as democratic role models.

Seven of the contributors (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) mention continued or increased assistance in Afghanistan (one notable absence is Poland, where Jacek Kucharczyk points out that parties on both the Left and the Right are growing weary of the country's sizable Afghan military mission); six (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) mention playing a leadership role in promoting the Western agenda in Ukraine and/or the Western Balkans; three (Czech Republic, Poland and Romania) mention providing expanded options for U.S. power projection; and two (Hungary and Slovenia) mention accepting prisoners from Guantanamo Bay. Six contributors (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and to a lesser extent Slovenia) allude to their capitals' willingness to act as institutionally-embedded allies for the United States within the EU.

On this latter point, the essays bear examination alongside CEPS analyst Piotr Maciej Kaczyński's essay from the EU institutional perspective. Many of the contributors echo Kaczyński's observation that the new member states are becoming more fully "European," that they are coordinating policy with one another in EU decision-making councils, and that, gradually, the EU is shedding its East-West divide. All are welcome trends from a U.S. perspective.

On one important point, however, the authors diverge. The member-state essays indicate a stronger desire for U.S. regional engagement than Kaczyński says is perceived or wanted in Brussels. The nature of that desire is different than in the past; Central European capitals, as Kaczyński points out, "are no longer poor" and, to the extent that they need financial help, are likely to look to Brussels rather than Washington. But as the essays show, it is not financial help that the Central Europeans want from the United States. It is security. And no matter how much progress the European integration process may have made in other areas, the essays show that it still falls short in providing this most basic and essential of public goods.

Until this changes, the EU's eastern member states will likely continue to look to America for security underwriting – irrespective of how disappointed they may

have been by Iraq or missile defense or how deeply supportive they are of European integration. This reality is borne out in the essays. With the exception of Slovenia, where Sabina Kajnc̃ says that policymakers have consciously subordinated national foreign-policy priorities to Brussels, none of the contributors describe the kind of EU-first political or geopolitical priorities that will be needed if Europe is to eventually play the role of a unified actor.

This phenomenon is not unique to the new member states. As SWP analyst Kai-Olaf Lang writes, Germany is often less inclined to utilize EU institutional mechanisms than newcomers like Poland would like. This is especially true on matters related to energy security or relations with Russia. The cleavages that these two issues – along with long-simmering historical feuds, the rise of Central Europe’s “new populists” and disagreements over how to handle the financial crisis – have opened up between Germany and key Central European states in the period since the 2004 enlargement represent a serious obstacle to European integration. That they have been exacerbated by “New” European participation in U.S. foreign-policy initiatives like Iraq and missile defense has fueled the perception that U.S. involvement in Central Europe works at cross-purposes with intra-EU harmony and, therefore, with the goal of integration.

Yet as Olaf-Lang points out, a robust American role in Central Europe is likely on balance to strengthen rather than loosen the bonds of cooperation with the Union. The issue areas he cites where Berlin would like to see increased U.S. attention – assuaging Central European insecurity through re-affirmation of NATO, renewed engagement in the eastern frontier to offset deceleration in NATO eastern enlargement, assistance in improving Central European governance, and encouraging the new members to invest more deeply in relations with Germany and other core EU members – could present an eventual rallying-point around which to U.S.-German and U.S.-EU policy consensus on the Central and Eastern European region.

Such a course would likely require more of Germany than the United States. For if European observers occasionally criticize Washington of over-investment in the affairs of Central and Eastern European, Berlin is guilty of under-investment. Germany’s preferred policy approach towards Russia, which emphasizes bilateral relations as the optimal format for advancing German commercial interests and (as a positive but theoretical side-effect) bridging the East-West geopolitical divide, does much to stoke Polish and Baltic insecurities, propel intra-European friction and impair U.S.-EU relations.

This would be undesirable in any circumstances. But as Yury Fedorov from the Association for International Affairs points out, it comes at a moment when Russia is pursuing an intelligent and resourceful strategy aimed at driving

wedges within the European project and between the EU and the United States. The new member states figure prominently in this strategy, both as targets (a rehabilitated zone of interests) and as tools (a recruiting-ground for proxies with which to penetrate the EU) of Russian influence.

In both cases, Fedorov's essay serves as a reminder that the current Russian leadership looks at the Central European space very differently than policy-makers in Brussels, Washington, Warsaw or Prague. To Moscow, the political and geopolitical destiny of this region was not settled when its former satellites joined the EU and NATO. The reach of the Medvedev Doctrine does not stop at the borders of Europe; from a Russian perspective, Central Europe is "at play" again geopolitically. Moscow, Fedorov writes, would like to "dictate security- and defense-related issues" – such as U.S. missile defense – in the former Warsaw Pact area. At a minimum, it wants to neutralize its former satellites within EU institutions and impede their attempts at disseminating Western political ideas and institutions eastward into the post-Soviet space.

In pursuit of these aims, Russia uses a strategy of disaggregation far more sophisticated, purposeful and inimical to the aim of European integration than anything Washington had in mind during the Iraq War. Moscow actively promotes deep and lasting divisions between key old and new member states; it works to slow the normalization of East-West relations with the Union, to isolate Poland and other Atlanticist-minded member states within EU fora, and to stoke insecurity among the EU's most exposed members.

According to Fedorov, these and other geopolitical maneuvers are likely to grow more frequent in the years ahead as the weakness of Russia's economy lead its leaders to seek adventure abroad as a substitute for reform at home. The combination of Russian activity in the Caucasus or Eastern Europe and the militarization of Kaliningrad, should they occur, will magnify the sense of vulnerability expressed in the essays above and potentially lead with time to the emergence of a reactivated strategic frontier along Europe's eastern border.

Countering this trend should be the primary focus of U.S. policy in Central and Eastern Europe. Three general policy takeaways present themselves for the new U.S. administration. First, a reaffirmation of the credibility of the U.S. and NATO commitment to Central Europe is needed. In a post-Georgia War setting, many regional allies have begun to ponder the viability of U.S. and Western security commitments; proactively addressing these concerns – for example, by strengthening the U.S. or NATO presence on the ground in the region – could help to head off a more serious political crisis in the Alliance, should Russia invade Georgia a second time or interfere in Ukraine.

Second, the United States should invest more deeply in improving relations between key old and new member states of the EU. The rifts between Germany and Poland are more than an occasional irritant; they represent a serious impediment to the EU's continued development as a political and geopolitical actor. As long as they exist, the EU will be susceptible to Russian meddling and unable to form consensus on its most pressing agenda items, such as energy security and the Eastern neighborhood. The United States has successfully played the role of midwife to rapprochement in key intra-European relationships before (think of the Franco-German thaw of the 1950s); in today's Europe, it should actively encourage Berlin and Warsaw to deepen ties.

Third and most importantly, the new administration should work to ensure that its efforts at "resetting" relations with Russia do not come at the expense (perceived or real) of relations with its Central European allies. This was one of the most frequently-cited concerns expressed in the essays above. Any high-profile investments that the White House makes in relations with Russia should be accompanied by investments in relations with the countries to Russia's west – e.g., by deepening U.S. security ties, reaffirming U.S. support for NATO's Article V and seeking opportunities to cooperate with Central European states on Ukraine and the Western Balkans. In addition to counteracting the effects of the "reset," such moves would help to dissuade Russian adventurism and ameliorate any lingering concerns about U.S.-Central European relations that may have carried over from the Iraq War.

As the essays above demonstrate, the Central Europeans are not, as some U.S. critics of NATO enlargement in the 1990s feared, free riders on U.S. security. The contributions that these mostly small- and mid-sized states make – not only as participants in U.S. military missions but as institutionally-embedded allies in the EU and as role models of successful democratic reform for the nations to their east and beyond – are likely to increase in the years ahead as they come to play a more visible leadership role in the EU.

While it is important not to exaggerate the centrality of the states of Central Europe to America's most pressing international concerns, the essays above serve as a reminder that these are relationships that the United States cannot afford to neglect.