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## **Russian invasion triggers changes in the security architecture in Central and Eastern Europe**

**The structure of the security system in Central and Eastern Europe might have been revolutionized as both state and non-state actors performed decisive actions in reaction to the Russian reinitiated attack on Ukraine. Germany announced an extreme reshape of its Ostpolitik, but the true nature and durability of such a shift remain unknown. The EU is still a “military midget,” but the organization’s decision to back one of the fighting parties by providing it with lethal military aid may trigger a debate on supranationalisation of CFSP. The ongoing events revitalized domestic debates in Finland and Sweden on possible accession to NATO, even though it is still unlikely to happen. The escalation has also proven the great geopolitical importance of both Poland and Belarus. However, the policy and position of the latter remain very uncertain.**

The most recent Russian large-scale offensive in Ukraine that started in the early morning, 24 Feb after seven years of frozen conflict initiated exceptional international reactions that may completely reshape the geopolitical reality in Central and Eastern Europe, a shift that must have come as a shock to many, including decision-makers in Russia.

The first crucial change came with Germany’s decision to deliver anti-tank weapons to Ukraine along with Stinger MANPADs and Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s announcement that “the 2022 federal budget will provide a one-off sum of 100 billion EUR for (...) necessary investments and armament projects (...)”. Additionally, the German government will “invest more than two percent of our gross domestic product in our defence”. After all, the hitherto policy of Angela Merkel’s governments was very restrained when it came to the state’s military development and expenditures on the required level of 2% of GDP, as allies agreed during the NATO Wales summit in 2014. The latter was one of the bones of contention in Germany’s relations with the US under President Trump. As a result, the German army chief, Gen. Alfons Mais, soon after the war in Ukraine re-erupted assessed that the Bundeswehr “is more or less blank” and that the options that the army may offer to support the Allies are extremely limited. Besides, Germany was also very reserved about the militarization of NATO’s Eastern Flank, most notably after 2014, as well as about the Alliance’s military cooperation with Ukraine. Berlin expressed its dissatisfaction not only verbally, but also by concrete strategic communication initiatives when it was delaying military deployment in the region by not granting transport permission or by vetoing Ukraine’s participation in the Allies’ military manoeuvres. For a long time, the main assumption of Germany Ostpolitik was that one may build the European security system, with Russia unopposed to it. Chancellor Scholz declaration is a signal that Germany might have changed its stance. The true nature of this shift, however, remains unclear. The Russian invasion could have sobered German elites, but at the same time it is possible that Berlin did not want to become the last pariah of Europe. In fact, these two are not mutually exclusive. Surprisingly, the shift is also widely accepted by the German people, who support arms deliveries to Ukraine and rearmament of Bundeswehr, as revealed in the most recent snap poll (78% in favour of arms deliveries and rearmaments informs Der Tagesspiel). Bearing in mind the importance of German transport infrastructure for the security of NATO’s Eastern Flank, Germany’s new position on security is essential. Notably, such a reshape of Berlin’s foreign policy will also require a more balanced structure of natural resource imports. Indeed, Chancellor Scholz has already announced that the government has made the decision to rapidly build two LNG terminals in Brunsbüttel and Wilhelmshaven. The question remains, however, how long this policy will continue.

Secondly, Germany’s more resolute position was followed by the European Union’s unprecedented and extraordinary decision to provide the third country, being at war, with supplies of lethal arms. These two come

together and are consequential since the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU remains in the intergovernmental sphere. On the late evening 27 Feb, Josep Borell, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, indicated that the Council of the EU agreed to “provide arms – lethal arms, lethal assistance – to the Ukrainian army for a value of 450 million EUR support package and 50 million EUR more for the non-lethal supplies – fuel and protective equipment”. For a long time, the EU was considered a “military midget” with only symbolic common armed forces such as Eurocorps and the EU Battlegroups, which had never been used. The decision to deliver military aid to Ukraine will certainly not change that impression since these are still the EU member states who possess military capacities, especially having in mind that they too have some shortcomings. However, it will most likely initiate a debate on the supranationalization of this branch of European integration, as well as let the EU get rid of its status of solely civilian/normative power.

Thirdly, the recent Russian military attack has a great impact on the so-called Northern Tandem security perception and foreign policy, the “grouping” that remains crucial for the security of NATO’s eastern front and stabilization of Baltic Sea region. In fact, both Sweden and Finland significantly reshaped its foreign policy and intensified cooperation with NATO and the US in particular, as seen in 2014 as a result of the initial phase of the Russian campaign in Ukrainian. Consequently, these two simply abandoned a policy of neutrality in favour of non-alignment status. Now they may go even further as for the first time in history, a majority of both Finnish and Swedish society supports the idea of their country accession to NATO – as media outlets in this states indicated – and the Parliament in Finland is soon expected to have a debate on that in a response to the petition of more than 50,000 signatures collected by Finns. Nevertheless, being aware of these countries’ balanced stance on rapid accession would be unprecedented and shocking, even though both countries are under continuous pressure from Russia. According to the Swedish Armed Forces, on Mar 2 four Russian fighting jets violated Swedish airspace east of Gotland. Earlier, both Sergei Lavrov, Russian MFA, and Maria Zaharova, MFA’s spokeswoman, announced that Finland or Sweden’s accession to NATO will lead to the serious military-political consequences.

The ongoing war in Ukraine has also proven the geopolitical importance of Poland. The state remains a crucial hinterland for Ukraine and a pivotal state for NATO Eastern Flank. This derives from the state’s potential and geographical location, and requires at least state’s twofold engagement in both civil and military dimensions. Mere the scale of Ukrainian migration to Poland indicates Poland’s importance. On Mar 6 the number of Ukrainian refugees who fled to Poland reached 1 million, according to Polish Border Guards, and the number is still growing. As a result, the country totally revolutionized the model of migration policy by accepting all these people without a single refugee camp. No less important is Poland’s role in the transport of military aid to Ukraine from both Poland and allies, as well as countries contributing to the securing NATO Eastern Flank.

Lastly, the status of Belarus remains unclear, especially when it comes to the level of Lukashenko’s subordination to Russia, his influence over the Belarusian armed forces, and the fact that the country threatens to drop non-nuclear status as a result of the constitutional referendum that took place on Feb 27. Permanent deployment of Russian troops in the country, installation of military facilities – or in the worst-case scenario even an annexation – would completely reorganize the security architecture of Central-Eastern Europe. It should be noted, however, that granting the Belarusian territory for the purpose of the Russian invasion in Ukraine has already changed a lot.

In Ukraine, the situation on the ground remains dynamic, as do the changes in the structure of the regional security system. The upcoming days could be decisive for Russian-Western relations, with structural changes that could be impossible to invert if the regime in Moscow lasts.

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