

Differences between the Foreign Policies of Europe and the USA

By Roman Joch

1. Introduction

More than three years ago, when three Central European countries joined NATO on the 12th of March 1999, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were very excited. At present NATO is on the threshold of irrelevance. And that is because opinions in America and Europe concerning their needed foreign and defence policy are at variance. America and Europe see the world and existing threats differently. Therefore there are voices in America saying that continental Europe is irrelevant to them and the only real allies of the USA are Great Britain, Turkey and Israel; these might be ad hoc – from case to case – complemented with Russia and India.

NATO may and may not step over the threshold of irrelevance before which it is standing right now. It also depends – but not only - on whether America will see and find other allies than only Great Britain and Turkey. Particularly those three post communist countries have the potential to become allies. They have not utilised it yet. That is because they blindly almost thoughtlessly followed the foreign policy line of Western Europe. Because of this fact there were only two directions in NATO: American and European. My analysis will come to the conclusion that to meet the real interests of Central Europe it is desirable to have three directions in NATO: as well as the American and the Western European also a Central European which should stand between those two at the same distance from both. This should make NATO an organisation more interesting for America than it is today and therefore also more relevant.

2. Fundamental differences

The mentioned difference in the views of America and Europe on the world and present threats concerns also the question how to ensure peace in the world and own security. Answers given by America and Western Europe differ and sometimes are even opposite. At the same time it is necessary to say that neither America nor Western Europe give fully homogenous answers. A significant part of the American left wing does not agree with the American answer and consider the European answer to be correct, and many of the European right wing do not agree with the answer provided by the Western European consensus and consider the American answer to be right.

The American answer is that only power and its use, i.e. by force of determent or preventive destruction of potential aggressors and threats, can provide peace in the world and their own safety. The European answer says that negotiations, talks and international treaties on disarmament as well as the establishment of common supranational institutions may achieve the same. These answers are sometimes compatible but very often are not. And such issues as the establishment of the International Court of Criminal Justice, the conflict between Israel and Palestine or treaties on prohibition of some types of arms lead, with no doubt, the USA and Europe to opposite conclusions with respect to needed foreign and defence policies.

As I will argue, mainly the American answer is correct while the Western European answer is not – but with one exception - this exception is the European Union where the Western European answer is correct and adequate. The process of European

integration that has been going on for fifty years is a unique and successful attempt to overcome traditional European internal rivalry, and European wars to which the rivalry usually led in the past. The traditional European Realpolitik of pursuing own national interests by power, and using power solutions to mutual conflicts in Europe, have always led to catastrophic wars involving the whole of Europe. The way out from this impasse of European history was and still is the creation of common European institutions that interconnect various interests and solve problems by negotiations, compromises and treaties. The fact that these institutions, that represent a platform for alternate negotiations, exist is often more important than the conclusions brought by respective talks because it, without taking into account specific results, ensures one thing: people who talk and negotiate do not fight wars.

3. Values of trans-Atlantic civilisation

Ensuring the success of this solution presumes one precondition that is often forgotten, but is absolutely essential: common culture, common civilisation and common concept of justice. This is then followed by the common political goals of peace and freedom. Only if partners share common political values is it possible to assume that the arguments among them are not a consequence of bad will, but only a consequence of misunderstanding or slightly different priorities. But these could be harmonised by negotiation and compromise.

To apply the European internal experience to the whole world would be a fatal mistake because there is not only one civilisation with a common concept of justice, but several civilisations with diametrically different concepts. Therefore arguments among countries that belong to different civilisations – or among those where their leaders do not share the same views on what is right and what is wrong – often arise not as a consequence of pure misunderstanding but as a consequence of following diverse, often impossible to reconcile, objectives. A classic example was an argument between the free, democratic and capitalist West and the totalitarian communist Soviet block. In this case it was not possible to solve arguments by negotiations and compromises, because if your goal is to preserve your freedom and the goal of your opponent is to take your freedom away from you, then a compromise representing half freedom and half slavery is simply not interesting for you.

And this is to a certain extent also the case in today's world. The opinions of rulers on what is a proper relationship between a citizen and state are not identical, moreover they are not even remotely cognate. Opinions on relationships between citizens and state and on a citizen's freedom scale are fundamentally different in western regimes on one hand and Saddam Hussein's and Chinese regimes on the other hand. In other words it is a reality that many rulers do not want their villains to have any freedom. And if they do not wish any freedom for their citizens, they do not wish any freedom for those in other countries either.

4. Conditions for peace

Further it is necessary to realise that there is no power vacuum in international relations: if one of the world powers leaves a certain geographical area, another one with an alternative idea of relationships between citizens and state will immediately occupy it. Therefore, if we want to ensure a free and democratic form of rule in a specific area, it is absolutely vital to have there a power or powers that will defend and protect this form of rule.

It is also important to understand that peace and security cannot be granted only by the treaties themselves. They can be granted only by the treaties backed up by power.

Tyrants do not observe treaties only because they have accepted them. They will observe a treaty only when they know that if they violate it, they will pay an unacceptable price and it is in their own interest not to violate it. But if a tyrant believes that such a violation of the treaty that has been signed by him will pay out, he will not hesitate to do it. Many of those who share leftist opinions on foreign policy do not realise this fact. They believe that a ruler will trigger a war just because he has not signed any peace treaties before. By this they only prove their total ignorance of the mentality and psychology of potential aggressors. A ruler will perpetrate an aggressive act not because he has not signed any peace treaty that would forbid him to do it; the ruler will perpetrate an aggressive act because he thinks that aggression will pay out – i.e. war booty, new lands or an increase in power are worth the losses he might suffer. In contrast, he will not even consider any aggression when he realises that the price for it is atrocious. – e.g. destruction of his power, regime or himself.

5. Fight for freedom

An unequivocal conclusion brought by history, particularly in the 20th century, is the fact that peace and security in free countries – i.e. in the countries where regimes guarantee their citizens a significant extent of personal, economic and political freedom – can be granted only by power, an armed power and the deterrent potential of these countries. Freedom and protection from Hitler, Stalin or Brezhnev were not granted by treaties signed with them - we central Europeans have learned especially from our own tragic experience that they violated any treaty they had signed – but only by power from free western countries. The free western world was not saved from communism and Nazism by anything else but only by western power. And it will be the same in the future when it comes to other dictators and enslaved countries.

In order to understand this reality we may formulate the first principle of a desired foreign and defence policy: the protection of a free form of rule that is usual in the countries mostly belonging to western civilisations, from tyrannical regimes that are all outside the western civilisations. To ensure this it is absolutely vital to preserve the western military power. Within the countries of the West it is not that important what this distribution of power is like – i.e. which country or countries are the strongest - but it is absolutely essential for the West as a whole to be powerful; and at least so powerful, or better even stronger, than all those non-free regimes together.

Secondly, the international treaties that objectively limit the power of free countries are disadvantageous. They are disadvantageous because western countries that accept such treaties mostly observe them while there is no certainty that dictators and tyrants will. In fact, there is a certainty based on experience that they will put all effort into secret avoidance and violation of the treaties. In these circumstances the treaties which were meant as reciprocal, limit perfectly the power of the free West, but do not limit sufficiently, or at all, the power of tyrants.

Thirdly, the countries having freedom do not fear the power of those regimes with which they share identical concepts of justice and correct relationships between citizens and state, but have all the reasons to fear the power of tyrannical regimes. This fact should be incorporated into their foreign policy. In other words, liberal democracies do not have to fear other liberal democracies, but they must fear the power of tyrannical regimes. Therefore a liberal democracy should be on the side of liberal democracies in various conflicts and not remain neutral or even on the side of a tyrannical regime when others fight it. In other words the foreign policy of a liberal democracy should contain significant preferences for other liberal democracies.

And now, based on these principles, let's have look at a desirable foreign policy for Central European countries.

Firstly, they should make efforts to minimize conflicts with liberal democracies from western civilisations. The conflicts should not be brought to a head and be a grudge match. On the contrary, because our partners and opponents belong to our civilisation and share our concept of justice, it is possible to solve and neutralise conflicts by negotiation and compromise.

Secondly – accession and membership in the European Union. This is the tool and place for peaceful solutions to European inside arguments. Our participation in decision making within the European Union will increase our influence on decision making that has an impact on the future of our continent and our country. Even if we were not in the European Union, the European Union would have a greater influence on our destiny but we would have no opportunity to change it. When we are in the EU, our influence on the destiny of the continent will be greater than it is now although taking into account the small number of our citizens or the size of our country. It is in our interest to be there where it is being decided about us and not isolate ourselves from centres of this decision making.

And thirdly, because the Western European analysis of the situation inside Europe is correct but it is not correct with respect to relations of the western society to the world, where the American analysis is right. The Central European attitude should gradually break away from the western European attitudes and step forward towards the American attitudes when it comes to relations between the West and the rest of the world. In the main, it should move onto a position promoting the preservation of a complex western power that is the only power able to ensure our freedom and security. The Central European approach should oppose the limitation or restriction of the western power and should promote positive attitudes of a liberal democracy towards other liberal democracies, especially when these are in conflict with a tyrannical regime. With respect to this we may mention two cases: attitude towards the International Criminal Court and towards Israel.

6. International Criminal Court

Unlike the Western European countries, the U.S.A. has not signed the agreement on joining the International Criminal Court. The International Criminal Court is so full of flaws, and hides so many dangers that we can only wonder how it is possible that very few people realise it, and how small the opposition is. First of all, its establishment is at variance with logical practice proving that agreements bind only those countries that have joined them. But this court also claims jurisdiction over citizens of those countries that have not accepted it or pronouncedly refuse to accept it. That said, the court claims universal jurisdiction. Furthermore, the court's competencies have not been explicitly defined and set, and the court itself may formulate and thus also broaden them in the course of time. And finally, the crimes against humanity that should be tried and punished by the court have not been explicitly defined also, and it is only up to the court to decide what contents it will assign to respective crimes. The International Criminal Court is a germ of an absolutist institution with unlimited powers, that alone will set its jurisdiction, competencies as well as crimes it may punish. And being such, it goes against modern liberal constitutionalism that is based on a division of power among legislature, executive and judiciary as well as on the system of control and counterweight, i.e. on the fact that power of any institution must be limited by power of another competitive

institution and, at the same time, that any institution cannot define and broaden its own powers. In other words, the philosophy behind the International Criminal Court is in contradiction with the philosophy of the forefathers – the founders of the American constitution – but it is in concord with the philosophy of the French Jacobites: concentration of power in one centre, firstly in the Convent and then in its Committee for Public Welfare.

Moreover, judges of the International Court of Criminal Justice are to have various legal backgrounds and traditions that – euphemistically said – are not compatible with the western conception of justice. Particularly when it comes to judges from the third world there is a legitimate concern that they will be led by their traditional animosity towards everything western and will make the court a tool that will serve as an extensive criticism of western countries, presenting them as allegedly the most oppressive and criminal. In fact, this could only lead to a restriction on western military capacity for action and power that represents the most effective guarantee of freedom and human rights in the world. Therefore it is right that as many as possible of the western countries ignore the International Court of Criminal Justice.

In the case of the Arab – Israeli conflict the USA holds a pro - Israel position while the European Union is in a pro-Palestine position. The Munich experience taught us well that when it comes to a conflict between a liberal democracy and powers of tyranny and violence, it is not possible to take both sides as morally equal – and this was the mistake that Western Europe made in Munich in 1939. Israel is a liberal democracy that guarantees its Arab citizens more personal and political freedom than any other Arab regime.

Moreover, the fundamental problem from which this conflict has arisen was not Israel's unwillingness to accept the Palestinian's right to have their own state – which was, by the way, incorporated in the Oslo treaty - but it was the unwillingness of decisive Palestinian powers to accept the Israelis right to have their own state. The total destruction of Israel still remains the main objective of decisive Palestinian groups and therefore they keep on carrying out terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians – with the full consent of, the so called, Arafat's authority.

Then the fundamental question of the Israeli – Arabic conflict is the same as was the case of the British – German conflict in World War II or in the case of American – Russian conflict in the cold war: i.e. whether a liberal democracy as a form of rule in a given territory survives, or whether it will be destroyed and replaced by a tyrannical regime.

7. Conclusions for Central Europe

Small Central European countries have an eminent interest in liberal democracies being on the side of other liberal democracies and not in favour of their enemies. Moreover, in Israel's case there is also another link: its citizens are members of our civilisation; they are literally “our” people meaning that many of them were born here and lived here, among us for some time.

If there were only two voices in NATO – American and (all-) European – NATO would lose its importance for America and would become an irrelevant institution. This is true because NATO needs America to exist while America does not need NATO. Besides, Europe needs America to ensure own security more than America needs Europe. If America comes to a conclusion that there are no real partners in Europe, it will look for – not allies, but certainly ad hoc partners – somewhere else; e.g. in Russia. The long-term security of the small Central European countries lying

between Germany and Russia would hang by a thread without the American presence in Europe. Therefore it is in the best interest of all small Central European countries to preserve an American presence in Europe. It is also desirable that Europe does not speak with only one voice and in contradiction to America, but that there is also a Central European voice, different from both Western European and American voices, situated somewhere in the middle between them.

Of course, the Central European voice will never be as strong and bold as the Western European voice (not speaking about the American voice), but it may, and must play the same role towards the Western European voice as the Western European voice plays towards the American voice: the role of friendly dissent. This voice should be identical with the Western European voice when dealing with European issues, and closer to the American voice when it comes to the relations of the West with the rest of the world.

The author is the director of the Civic Institute in Prague and co-operates with the Conservative Institute of M. R. Štefánik.

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