

# NATO's Future Includes Central Europe

By MAREK MATRASZEK

WARSAW—As the new Commonwealth of Independent States is formed from the old Soviet Union, Western policy makers are rightly concerned about the security implications for the new Europe. The very vagueness of the proposed CIS only serves to underline the possible conflicts that lie ahead, not only between the new republics on a national and ethnic basis, but also within the republics as the inevitable social dislocations brought on by economic reform begin to bite.

So what should the West do? At the moment, with attention focused on the formation of the CIS and the post-Maastricht integration of Western Europe, many central Europeans feel they have been forgotten at a time when they provide many of the answers to this fundamental problem. They argue that a successful transition for the CIS is linked to stability in central Europe, which, in turn, is dependent on closer relations with NATO and the EC.

## Initiatives Fall Short

Poles, Czechoslovaks and Hungarians do not deny that closer ties with Western economic, political and military structures have been established. The EC has signed an association agreement with the "Triangle"; Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary are members of the Council of Europe; and the recent NATO summit in Rome established the principle of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council as an institutional framework for links with the former communist states. But these initiatives fall short of what central Europe—and the West—really needs. Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary still feel that they are viewed as awkward and impoverished country cousins, to be allowed into the family home if they knock on the door, but kept at arm's length from the domestic larder.

That is certainly the impression in central European capitals after the EC announced that the much-touted program for channelling food aid to the former Soviet Union through Central Europe would be pared back—so much as to make it worthless. While an October declaration by James

Baker and Hans-Dietrich Genscher promised NATO offices in central European capitals, the Rome NACC initiative lumps the "Triangle" in with Romania, Bulgaria and the former Soviet republics, rather than initiating the "positive differentiation" that the countries of the Triangle had been seeking. Some in the West argue that the central Europeans should not concern themselves with NATO but look to the WEU instead. They should not flatter themselves, for at the very most central Europeans view the WEU as a stepping stone to NATO itself: that is their final goal, and will not go away through wishful thinking by the West.

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Is NATO right at being so cautious in embracing the central Europeans? The argument is that the central European armed forces are dominated by the old guard, are unreliable and a potential security risk. But given the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the disbanding of the KGB, that is becoming an unconvincing view. Others say that to extend NATO eastward is unnecessarily provocative toward the emerging democracies of the CIS; yet the example of Yugoslavia shows that such a hands-off stance is the best method of encouraging aggression.

The real reason for the caution lies in the debate about the future role of NATO in the new Europe. It is no secret that the French wish to undermine the role of the U.S. on the continent. This is the motive behind their attempts to set the WEU outside the NATO framework (thankfully scotched at Maastricht), the moves to carry forward the Franco-German brigade initiative, and that typically French fantasy of the European Confederation. Thus any moves that bring central Europeans closer into the NATO structure are—in the eyes of the French—only a watering down of this strategic goal. On the other hand, one school of thought

within NATO argues that the organization ought to become the chief policeman for the area covered by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This means other CSCE countries (in particular central and eastern Europe) winding down their defense forces and industries, and not receiving any significant defense technology transfers from the West.

Both schools of thought are dangerous to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and, in the long run, to NATO itself. In the first case, any attempt to lock the U.S. out of Europe is folly at a time when it is precisely the U.S. that is proving to be the only

guarantor of a stable transition for the CIS, (in comparison with the impotence of the EC in Yugoslavia). If there is any time in which the U.S. should be in Europe it is now. In the second case, no central European country will accept its institutional subordination on defense matters to NATO. Would the NATO alliance defend, for example, the Polish-Ukrainian border? The central Europeans cannot be denied their own defense capacity. So Europe needs a strong U.S. presence, and it needs a strong and secure defense in central Europe; without either, NATO is weakened.

The U.S. and NATO should make it clear that their strategy toward the formation of the CIS is intimately connected with stability in central Europe. The process of democratization and marketization in the former Soviet Union will be much more painful and hazardous than in central Europe, where geographical size, political culture, relative ethnic homogeneity and proximity to western Europe has made the transition manageable. The best encouragement to success in the CIS is nevertheless the central European example, which shows that sacrifices and patience are rewarded in the long run. Germany

collapse of the central European reform process would fatally weaken the forces of reform in the CIS, with much greater geo-strategic consequences for the U.S. and Europe. Mr. Baker's search for guarantees from the CIS on nuclear weapons could be further undermined if the importance of central Europe in the process is ignored. So it is in NATO's interests to ensure that central Europe is secure and stable and that it exists in a framework that acts as a guarantee for the reform process.

## Inseparable Futures

It is clear that the future of the three European security regions—NATO, central Europe, and the CIS—cannot be separated. NATO should act now to bring the central Europeans closer into its military structure, perhaps by making use of a broad interpretation of article 4 of the NATO Treaty, which allows for consultations in time of threat to the NATO area. It should be more liberal in terms of transfer of technology and material, and do more to retrain the central European officer corps. NATO countries should also be bold enough to earmark cash for military aid, for example to assist in the relocation of central European armies to their eastern borders where the greatest dangers to their security lie. Indeed, any future aid to central Europe should be given with such security issues in mind.

In all these examples, the U.S. should take the lead to ensure that it is NATO and not the WEU that makes the key decisions. Western policy makers should bear in mind that the problems and needs of central Europe are different from those of the CIS and that there is a concomitance of interests between the central Europeans and NATO towards the CIS. By doing so, NATO will be halfway toward a consistent and far-reaching strategy for managing a stable transition from communism to democracy in Europe.

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