

# Russia – Central Europe relations

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# **Part I: Decreasing Role of (Communism) History**

# I.1. Troubled past

CEE perception:

**1944-45 – Soviet occupation + gradual Sovietization**

Heavy human and material losses, deportations, forced labor, etc.

**1945/49-1989: national Communist regimes**

1953, 1956, 1968, 1981: regular crises in the 'Eastern Bloc'

RU perception

**1944-45: Soviet Union liberated CEE**

**1945/49 – 1989: fruitful co-existence, progress**

# **I.2.: 'Inherited' problems mostly settled**

- Withdrawal of the Red Army**
- Peaceful end of the Warsaw Pact**
- Soviet state-debt settled**
- Restitution of confiscated artifacts: minor progress**
- Joint discussion of common history has started**
- Demographic element**

Basis is present for normal interstate relations between CEE and RU.

# **Part II: Security and defense: prevailing mistrust**

# II/1. Prevailing Russian mistrust

Russian pro- *status quo* agenda

**Russia was strongly opposed to 1999 NATO enlargement... ...but finally digested it**

(1999: Kosovo-crisis!)

**Russia opposed the missile defense system to be stationed in Central Europe (PL,CZ, HU!)**

**On-going intensive RU intelligence activities: NATO, EU and business-related targets**

# II/2. Central Europe: NATO!

**CE relies on NATO framework:** low defense spendings, limited capabilities

**Contribution to on-going NATO operations**

**Strongly Atlanticist foreign policies** (Klaus? Orbán?)

**Defense-related cooperation with Russia in NATO framework** (+ police)



# **Part III: Foreign policy: from Mutual Ignorance to Cold Pragmatism**

# III/1. Yeltsin-era

## Asymmetric importance

### Russia:

1997: the first-ever strategic document about Central Europe: **already recognized the importance of CEE as future NATO and EU members!**

2013: New Russian foreign Policy Concept:  
CE is not even mentioned! CE is important mostly due to its EU and NATO membership

### Central Europe:

Relations with Russia is always foreign policy priority

## **III/2. Yeltsin-era**

**Intensive, often compensatory start:** visit of Yeltsin, etc.

**Generally low interest, and mutual ignorance**

1997: the first-ever strategic document about Central Europe

Not much economic perspective

No RU minorities present

**CE not unified:** HU, CZ, PL: pro-European foreign policy vs. Mečiar's Slovakia until 1998

**Negative turn due to NATO-enlargement and Kosovo**

# III/4. Putin-era

## **More assertive RU foreign policy**

Positive effects of 09.11 quickly fade away

## **Cooling down of relations from mid-2000s**

**NATO-Russia tensions**

**Assertive acquisition efforts**

**War in Georgia**

**CE's engagement in the 'color revolutions' and the Eastern Partnership**

# III/5. Putin-era

**Structural differences in CE foreign policies, defined mainly by the level of dependence on Russia**

**PL: political ambitions dominate over pragmatic interests**

**CZ: more value-oriented; cool CZ-RU political relations, but intensive trade and tourism**

**HU, SK: more pragmatism (energy dependence!), less values**

**In most cases these priorities prevail, regardless of the actual governments (exceptions: Mečiar, Kaczyński, + Orbán?)**

# **Part IV: Business as (Should be) Usual**

# IV/1.Trade

**Bilateral trade: strong Russian sufficit** (to CE 90+ per cent oil and gas)

**Strategic RU investments: repeated, but repelled efforts**  
(except HU and the Paks-deal...)

**Non-strategic investments: increasing activity**

Purchase of Volksbank by Sberbank!

# IV/2. Tourism and people-to-people contacts

**Tourism: highly unbalanced:** large inflow from RU, almost no tourism from CE.

Recent sharp decrease due to the crisis of RU tourism industry

**Intensifying people-to-people contacts:** education, business exchange, mixed marriages, etc.

The interest is present on both sides. **BUT: growing concerns about RU soft power influence**



# **Part V: The Ukraine crisis**

# V/1. CEE is divided

**CE is strongly divided – Visegrad is unable to act**

**Proximity, minority issues:**

**PL, HU, SK:** UA is direct neighbour, minority presence

**CZ:** no proximity, high number of UA guest workers,

**Geopolitical players vs. pragmatists**

PL vs. CZ, SK, HU

Varying contribution to NATO operations

Varying support to UA (from PL also military!)

# V/2. RU policy: dominance of strategic interests

Importance of CEE for Russia: not *per se*, but as part of EU and NATO.

**Strategic Russian interests about the West dominate over bilateral considerations.** Co-ordinated, efficient Russian information warfare in all CEE states: fake news, propaganda, etc. **Damage on bilateral relations is of secondary importance.**

„**Divide and rule**” game: CZ, SK, HU used to divide and weaken the EU and NATO. Existing dependencies are fully used as leverages.

# V/3. Where do we go from here?

**RU „divide and rule” game so far largely ineffective: Western influence over CEE is stronger.**

EU sanctions could not be stopped.

NATO action could not be stopped.

Support to Ukraine could not be stopped.

**Compromited, badly planning CZ, SK, HU leaders will suffer, both in the West and in Moscow: loss of face, loss of credibility, loss of trust.**

**Lasting cool-down of RU-CEE relations is likely.**



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# **Thank you very much for your attention!**

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