

INCLUDE RUSSIA IN A FUTURE EUROPEAN SECURITY SYSTEM

Walter Schwimmer

(Former Secretary General of the Council of the Europe)

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Mr. Walter Schwimmer is a former Austrian politician and diplomat and former Secretary General of the Council of Europe between 1999- 2004. He is considered an expert on Russian- European affairs as during his tenure he handled the war in Chechnya. H.E Walter Schwimmer analyzes how the crisis in Ukraine affects the European security system, Russia - Europe relations and Russia- USA relations.

Q: Has the Ukrainian crisis changed the European security system?

A: I don't see already a change in the European security system, but the Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated the need for a change. For the time being there is the military alliance of NATO which core is Art.5 of the Treaty where the parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all. One could say in addition the European Union has since the Treaty of Lisbon a mutual defense clause which binds also the neutral members of the EU. But even together NATO alliance and EU mutual defense cannot be considered as a coherent European security system. Europe is larger than the EU and the European members of NATO. Whatever happens in Ukraine is neither covered by Art.5 of the NATO Treaty nor by the EU mutual defense clause. When overcoming the Ukrainian crisis the parties concerned should not forget how to include Russia in a future European security system.

Q: Putin has been criticized from Europe and Washington for an intervention in Ukraine state. Please, your comments.

A: There are of course reasons to criticize Putin as the annexation of Crimea was against international law and Russian support for the separatists in Eastern Ukraine is an intervention in the internal affairs of another country. But one should not oversee that the so-called "West" ignored at the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis that Ukraine is not only a neighbor of the EU but also of Russia with whom Ukraine should also have good relations (and has close economic ties). To turn the anti-corruption Maidan

into an anti-Russian movement was a mistake from Western as well as from Ukrainian side. And everybody knew that there is a large amount of Russian speaking citizens in Ukraine. I am convinced escalation could have been avoided by offering in time a dialogue to Russia as well as to representatives of the Russian population in Eastern Ukraine.

Q: The minorities seem to play an important role in Europe. What do you believe?

A: Europe's advantage is its rich diversity of peoples, languages and cultures. This diversity is not an obstacle but an asset. Minorities are not only part of this asset and of the European cultural heritage but could very often also building bridges between nations. On the other side ignoring the interests of minorities can lead to dangerous tensions and conflicts. Helping them to maintain their cultural identity contributes to stability in the country.

Q: The crisis between Kiev and Moscow can provoke another energy crisis. European Union will become again a hostage of this energy dispute. How European Union could reduce its energy reliance from Russia?

A: Diversifying the energy supply and in particular fostering new, renewable energy sources will diminish any dependence in the energy sector. But it is also in mutual interest to avoid any disturbances in the energy supply including the one for Ukraine.

Q: The energy reserves of the eastern Mediterranean (Cyprus- Israel) have created expectations that they could cover the European energy demands in the future. Is it possible?

A: I am not a specialist in energy affairs and cannot assess the amount of the energy reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean, but as already said before, diversification is in any way an advantage.

Q: The rift between the USA and Russia prevent the creation of an effective common front against the ISIS. Do you agree?

A: Soviet Union and USA were the two super powers in the bipolar world of the Cold War. Russia realized that she is not anymore the 2nd super power but is (understandingly) opposed to an American claim to be the super power of a unipolar world. An understanding of the two powers that there is a common responsibility for peace, stability and justice in the world would be without any doubt very helpful to find responses to threats to these values like ISIS.

Q: The economic-social development of the deprived Muslim societies is considered a solution against the expansion of the Islamic Fundamentalism. What do you think?

A: I fully agree. Without addressing the root causes the combat against Islamic (and other) fundamentalism will not succeed. Young people without education, jobs and perspectives for the future are the ideal source for recruitment of fundamentalists. Governments in the Middle East as well as in Europe are challenged.