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## A New NATO Social Contract Interview with Brigadier General (ret) Dr. Klaus Wittmann

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Interview with Dr. Klaus Wittmann conducted by Octavian Manea (Editor of *FP Romania*, the Romanian edition of *Foreign Policy*).

**The previous Strategic Concepts of the Alliance were forged in some very different security environments. In that sense some of their elements are outdated. Does the Alliance need a new social contract, a new consensus? On what elements?**

A new consensus is indeed required in two regards: *Firstly*, while in the Cold War era NATO would have fought an existential “war of necessity”, with a monolithic threat unifying Allies, in the new and ever-evolving security environment it engages in “wars of choice”, “discretionary operations”. There consensus is much more difficult to muster, because different threat assessments, historic experiences and national interests come to the fore. Honesty is required about the fact that there are ever more marked regional groupings within the Alliance such as those advocating a global orientation (US, UK, partly Canada); others emphasizing NATO’s regional character and advocating cooperative security (“old Europe”, but far from being united); several new members who, particularly after the Georgia war, insist on the priority of Article 5 and collective defense; and the Southern members emphasizing the dangers in the Mediterranean region. This makes the need for re-establishing strategic consensus very obvious. *Secondly*, there is great disunity within the Alliance about several central themes, such as NATO’s reach (regional or global), its main emphasis (Article 5 or out-of-area), the approach to Russia, nuclear policy and strategy, and the evaluation of some “novel” security challenges (including terrorism, proliferation, cyber threats, interference with energy security, and obstruction of the freedom of the seas).

My view about how the preparation of NATO’s new Strategic Concept has been handled in NATO (with the Group of Experts established by the Secretary General under former Secretary of State Albright’s leadership) is the following: Public debate, transparency, inclusiveness are desirable, and the “participatory process” can “loosen the ground” as it were, prepare consensus, fuel public debate and interest in NATO, get the strategic community involved, provide transparency and induce member states to clarify their positions and “show the colour of their cards”. But this will not replace the political work governments must do to create or re-establish

the consensus on the central contentious issues. That cannot be achieved by informal groups and seminars, and it should not be left to the drafting and negotiation process. Work on a draft cannot *create* political unity on highly controversial matters, it cannot replace tough decisions. Ideally, the Strategic Concept, to be agreed on at NATO's Lisbon summit, would *reflect* the consensus established among governments.

### **What is NATO all about today? Do we still need NATO?**

The North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, NATO's founding document, with its concretization in the periodically updated Alliance's Strategic Concepts, remains valid, particularly with its commitment to international peace, security and justice; the freedom, common heritage and civilization of its peoples founded on the principles of democracy; individual liberty and the rule of law, the purposes and principles of the United Nations and to the peaceful settlement of disputes. Also the 1949 Treaty's main provisions endure; consultation (Article 4), mutual assistance in the case of armed attack (Article 5) and openness for the accession of new members (Article 10). NATO embodies the Transatlantic link that makes North America and Europe one indivisible security space.

In the three phases of its history, NATO safeguarded Europe's security during East-West conflict, helped consolidate and stabilize Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe after the end of the Cold War, and took on peace missions beyond its area of mutual assistance after the terrorist attacks of September 2001. But the tasks of a new phase have not seamlessly replaced the preceding ones. Assured protection of member states' territory, population and forces remains an everlasting mission even without a concrete adversary; there is still much to be done to achieve a Europe "whole and free"; and out-of-area missions will continue to be asked of NATO, albeit not as its only action pattern for the future.

Beyond the assured protection of its members' liberty, populations and territorial integrity, NATO makes a valuable contribution to world peace and stability. The new global order, whose emergence the world is waiting for, will not simply be *pax americana*, which has served it well over many decades. Neither should it be "multi-polar" insofar as this concept carries confrontational connotations. It ought to be a cooperative world community, and NATO alone is certainly not the organization to bring it about. The Alliance, however, is a nucleus of stability and cooperation, which should continue to be at the service of the larger International Community. In the "interlocking" security-relevant organizations, where each should contribute what it is best at, NATO is at present the only alliance "with teeth" and offers as its specialties military forces, an integrated military command structure, planning capacities, decade-long experience in multinational military cooperation, joint defense planning, assistance in training and security sector reform.

With the rise of anti-status-quo powers, as you call them, NATO's emphasis on cooperation, transparency and confidence-building is of particular importance. And here some self-criticism with regard to intervention, democracy "export" and state-building ambitions may be in order.

**Over time, certain NATO countries on the eastern flank, especially Poland and the Baltics countries, have developed some real doubts about the West's commitment to their defense. Why did we get here? What has caused this chronically insecure state of the eastern flank?**

Here many factors come together: On the *one* hand Russia does not seem to have fully accepted the fact that several former Soviet Republics are now free and sovereign countries, and that some are now NATO members or aspiring for NATO membership. Misjudging their quest to join the West, Russia cultivates the idea that the West took advantage of its weakness after the end of the Cold War, with NATO “moving east”. There is the fear that a re-assertive Russia might encroach on its neighbors in what it calls its “near abroad”. Other factors are observations on how Russia dealt with Georgia (invasion) and Ukraine (treaty ties), its commitment to protect Russians abroad “wherever they live”, its “special sphere of interest” concept, its “history policy” (only recently somewhat revised vis-à-vis Poland) as well as exercises with worrying scenarios and the cyber attack on Estonia. During the Russo-Georgian war, which NATO contributed nothing to prevent, a newspaper article was titled “Would NATO defend Narva?”

On the *other* hand, a reduced sense of security in several NATO member states is only partly due to Russia’s new assertiveness. There are two other phenomena, NATO’s failure to visibly and credibly implement the security guarantee contained in Article 5 of the 1949 Treaty and the fact that the “pendulum” of NATO emphasis has quite extremely swung to the side of expeditionary operations. What is required is reinvigorating NATO in its main domain - protection of its members, whose sense of being secure is a prerequisite for NATO acting beyond its Article 5 responsibility, i.e. “out of area” - and also for the Alliance’s support by the citizens of the member states as well as for the new Allies’ readiness to improve cooperation with Russia.

It should be stressed at the outset that this does not solely concern the EEC countries or any potential threat from the east. Dangers to NATO territory and populations can also arise, e.g., in the north, in the south, and in the southeast. Security policy is to a large extent an insurance against the unforeseen, and reliable member state protection, complemented by cooperation with Partner states, should be NATO’s prime contribution to “preventive stabilization” in the Euro-Atlantic area. The resulting activities should be self-evident and routine for a military security alliance, not seen to be directed against anyone. It is essential, for obvious reasons, to avoid a predominantly anti-Russian, even Russia-focused pitch in this discussion.

**How can we fix this “solidarity problem”, restoring the faith in NATO? And what are the key core ingredients of Article 5 in order to provide a credible deterrence and a credible reassurance?**

We must create “reassurance” as a state of affairs, including the strategy and measures producing it, where solidarity, Alliance cohesion as well as the necessary commitments and preparations (political, military, and economic) ensure all member states’ confidence to be secure within an alliance of indivisible security.

This starts with an understanding of the situation and of the deficiencies, *firstly*, a consciousness of the negligence of pledges made to new member states in the first round of enlargement in terms of reinforcement planning, infrastructure, exercises etc., and the resulting lack of

reassurance in several countries, leading to concerns and (to secure the US' support) "bilateralism"; *secondly*, the acknowledgement that solidarity means "what concerns you concerns me" instead of the condescending appeals to some new member states to "change their perception of Russia"; *thirdly*, a thorough analysis of potential threats to, and vulnerabilities of, NATO members, not predominantly focusing on Russia, but including the Mediterranean region, Turkey's borders, the High North etc., and *fourthly* the consciousness that a functioning system of crisis identification, assessment and response will reduce the probability of such threats materializing in the first place.

Moreover, it must be clear what Article 5 means in terms of deterrence, defense, containment, and protection - incidentally, without discarding deterrence and defense; I would give more emphasis to the term "protection", because it is more "neutral", as it were.

From those considerations NATO must derive the need to "overhaul" the NATO system of crisis identification, assessment and response (the main components of "crisis management") in order to improve the preparedness to act as a matter of credibility. It should devise that overhaul in the most "neutral" way possible and "routinize" and "depoliticize" the crisis identification, assessment and response procedures, preparations and precautionary measures as basic, normal, self-evident hedges of a military alliance "against the unforeseen and unpredictable".

New NATO members must also do their "homework" regarding correct governance, security sector reform, armed forces modernization, defense preparations and cooperation with others to reduce their vulnerabilities. And old NATO members must restore and convince their populations of the solidarity commitment that is NATO's glue. (This particularly goes for my country, Germany, that enjoyed the solidarity of its Allies for decades, has most profited from the end of the Cold War, and should not now feel complacent and "saturated" in security matters, but take an active interest in "security reassurance" for the new member states.) And all this also has implications for resourcing the defense/protection effort.

Concrete ensuing measures would include the establishment of a full-fledged analysis and assessment capacity in NATO HQ; denser and more thorough consultation at NATO, where article 4 of the NATO Treaty must be rigorously activated; a definition of "contingency planning" that is not purely military; and planning exercises, reinforcement preparations, and infrastructure planning in all geographical directions.

Closest possible cooperation among old and new member states in many fields can complement such measures, and assistance to the Baltic Defence College in Tartu and "Baltic Air Policing" are positive examples. Finally, in the "reassurance" debate one should not forget the role arms control and confidence-building measures have to play, and be aware of the damage to transparency and confidence-building that the suspension of the CFE Treaty entails.

### **What should the New Strategic Concept say about Russia?**

NATO and Russia are bound to work together in particularly close cooperation, for which the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was founded. Its full use, however, has been impeded by resentments, and there are uncertainties about Russia's future course. Although the West did not

“take advantage” of Russia’s weakness after the end of the Cold War, NATO has to face up to its share of responsibility in the worsening of the relationship - it badly understood Russian political psychology and fear of marginalization, poorly orchestrated the last enlargement push, paid no attention to Russian proposals for the adaptation of the CFE Treaty, failed to present the missile defense issue as a truly common cause and has not contributed sufficiently to making optimal use of the NRC, particularly when it was most needed in the Georgia crisis.

Aiming for a genuinely new beginning, NATO’s new Strategic Concept should present a “conditional offer” for a new relationship with Russia, which it does not regard as an adversary and which, in turn, should cease to see NATO as a “danger” or even “threat”, and not aim to constrain or split it. In the awareness of many common interests in building the “common European house” and in hedging against universal dangers, threats and vulnerabilities, NATO should express readiness for broad cooperation with a Russia that would share the same values, respect the principles of the Charter of Paris, overcome old geopolitical and geostrategic categories, abandon Cold War clichés about NATO, give up the idea of a “special sphere of influence”, not instrumentalize “Russians abroad”, renounce revisionism and fully support sovereignty and independence of its neighbors, contribute itself to their “reassurance”, fully embrace cooperative (as opposed to confrontational) security, follow up its positive steps in “history policy” vis-à-vis Poland (and in future also others), and realize that Russia can only “isolate” itself.

Together NATO and Russia must overcome zero-sum thinking in security policy, where one side can allegedly only gain at the expense of the other. On the basis of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, whose potential is far from being realized, Russia and NATO together can cooperate on a host of issues of common interest and for the benefit of the peoples of Europe.

**Lord Ismay famously captured NATO's core mission as: “keep the Americans in, the Germans down and the Russians out”. Could you rephrase this aphorism in order to reflect the today's & tomorrow's raison d'être of the Alliance?**

In today’s much more complex world it seems impossible to phrase it so briefly and elegantly, so also the sarcasm gets lost. But, staying closely the famous dictum, I would say: Keep the Americans engaged, keep the Germans (and all others) integrated and responsible, make Russia cooperative – and have all contribute jointly to conflict prevention and crisis management beyond NATO’s perimeter.

*Brigadier general (ret) Klaus Wittmann is former director of academic planning and policy at the NATO Defence College in Rome. In May 2010, he co-authored together with Ronald Asmus, Stefan Czumur, Chris Donnelly, Aivis Ronnis and Tomas Valasek a major policy paper for The Centre for European Reform (CER, London) entitled “NATO, new allies and reassurance”. In September 2010, Klaus Wittmann also proposed an illustrative draft for the NATO’s new strategic concept that can be accessed here.*

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