



FRONT LINE

Lord Robertson, NATO Secretary General



PROSPECTS FOR NATO–RUSSIA RELATIONS

In 1805, when Austrian General Weynotter was planning for the Austerlitz campaign, he failed to take into account the ten-day difference between the Gregorian calendar, used in the West, and the Julian calendar, used in Russia. As a result, the Russian troops arrived «on time» – ten days late. There may be more than anecdotal value in this historic reminiscence: it shows that while both sides acted in good faith subjectively, not enough care was taken to establish a joint objective premise.

Looking back at NATO–Russia relations over the course of the 1990s, we have made progress that was unthinkable 10 years ago. But I cannot help feeling that our calendars and agendas were not always fully synchronised. This became particularly apparent last spring. Let's face it: 1999 was not

Lord Robertson, a former United Kingdom Secretary of State for Defence (Minister of Defence), took over as Secretary General of NATO from Dr Javier Solana on October 14, 1999.

Born in Port Ellen on the Isle of Islay in Scotland in 1946, he graduated in economics from the University of Dundee. He entered politics in the late 1970s and served as a Labour Party member of parliament for the Scottish constituency of Hamilton (later Hamilton South) from 1978 until his appointment as NATO Secretary General last year.

He served in various capacities in the United Kingdom while his party was in political opposition before becoming Secretary of State for Defence when the Labour Party came back to power in the May 1997 General Election.

Before taking up his appointment at NATO, he received a life peerage and took the title of Lord Robertson of Port Ellen.

the best of years for the development of NATO–Russia relations. The Kosovo crisis led to a serious setback in our partnership and temporarily overshadowed the overall prospects for NATO–Russia relations. Today, however, we have weathered that storm and prospects for our relationship have improved significantly.

After my visit to Moscow this February, I feel that we are at a new juncture in NATO–Russia relations. My Russian interlocutors and I agreed that dialogue and cooperation between NATO and Russia should be enhanced – in our mutual interest and in the interest of European security. This has already been reflected in our concrete work in the NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council. I am also very much encouraged by Acting President Putin's remarks made following my visit. They reflect a willingness to engage Europe, including the Alliance, to cooperate and to move the NATO–Russia relationship forward.

So it is a timely moment to reflect on the way ahead. I see three pivotal questions in this context which I would like to address: Why should NATO and Russia cooperate more closely? How should we cooperate? What can we achieve in the months to come in concrete terms?

As to the first question, the rationale for closer cooperation. The joint premise that we defined together at the end of the Cold War still stands: NATO and Russia face common challenges and we share a common responsibility for European security and stability. Playing unique strategic roles in the Euro–Atlantic area, Russia and NATO cannot afford to ignore each

other. Our cooperation can contribute an added value to European security.

This is neither an abstract nor a dated concept. Our cooperation in SFOR and KFOR, for example, is living proof of a shared commitment that serves Russian, NATO and pan–European security interests.

From our joint interest in European security and stability as a whole other specific mutual interests in our cooperation follow. These interests are defined in the NATO–Russia Founding Act. The areas of cooperation it spells out are as topical and beneficial to the interests of both sides today as they were three years ago when President Yeltsin and his NATO counterparts signed the Founding Act indeed a «magna carta» for our relationship.

True, the potential of the Founding Act could not be exploited fully until the start of the Kosovo campaign. But in the short time span from July 1997 to March 1999, the PJC developed into an indispensable venue for political consultation, particularly on Balkan and arms control issues. Under its umbrella a whole network of contacts was established that helped to shape NATO–Russia cooperation in detail. Thus the foundation for a good partnership was laid. We have now returned to that foundation. It is solid, we can build on it.

Secondly: How should we cooperate? First and foremost, the spirit of our dialogue and cooperation must be frank and realistic. And while we must not lose sight of our strategic aims, we must realise that a patient effort will still be needed to overcome stereotypes and misperceptions that have

become engrained in decades of an antagonistic relationship. The heritage of the Cold War still exerts a certain gravitational pull that at times propels us away from each other.

This is not to say that we do not have real and significant differences. We do. On Chechnya, for example, it is difficult to argue that Russia simply exerts its legitimate right to fight terrorism and preserve its territorial integrity when the campaign shows signs of an indiscriminate application of force against its own civilian population. But while we can disagree, we should air our differences openly, and not attribute to each other sinister motives.

Kosovo was such a case. Yes, we had a fundamental disagreement. That NATO and Russia could not see eye to eye on the military course of action taken by the Alliance was, perhaps, to be expected, given the unique history and circumstances of the crisis. But the disagreement on substance was not the only obstacle to finding a consensus. Perhaps more importantly, the misinterpretation by the Russian side of NATO's motives as following a deliberate anti-Russian design – a «geo-political plot» to marginalise Russian influence – stood in our way. This was perception pitted against the fact that from the start of the crisis, NATO wanted Russia on board in a joint effort to tackle a joint problem.

We must overcome the vestiges of old thinking that perceive security still as a zero-sum-game

where one side can only gain if the other loses. Building more trust and confidence is a first essential to fully liberate our relationship from such obsolete analytical patterns.

That leads me to my third question: How can we enhance trust and confidence through concrete achievements in the months to come? The first thing to do is to make full use of the mechanisms of cooperation and dialogue under the existing mandate of the Founding Act and to address topical issues affecting our security in the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council. I am pleased to say that after my visit to Moscow we have injected new energy into that important forum. For example, the Ambassadors of NATO countries and Russia have recently discussed, in all frankness and in a constructive and transparent atmosphere, NATO's Strategic Concept and Russia's National Security Concept. They also covered a whole range of topical questions regarding the present arms control agenda. And while differences of judgement may remain, that was an important confidence building endeavour that produced real benefits to both sides.

There is a long list of important issues, to be tackled step by step, where NATO and Russia can work together to achieve similar benefits. Let me give you just a few examples:

– We need to continue to discuss our respective military strategies and doctrines to dispel misperceptions and identify the com-

mon challenges with which we will both have to deal in the 21st century.

– More specifically, NATO and Russia can – and should – make a joint contribution to preventing the further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

– NATO nations can share their experience with Russia in the retraining of retired military officers and in defence conversion – programmes that could be of tangible help to Russia's economic development.

– Our relationship must be balanced. The lack of reciprocity in our mutual representation must be overcome. We want to establish a NATO Military Liaison Mission in Moscow, as foreseen by the Founding Act. We are also looking forward to the opening of a NATO Information Office in Moscow – an important project to put perception in line with reality and to enhance trust and confidence.

– Both NATO and Russia stand to gain from cooperation in armaments planning and air space management. NATO, for instance, would like to see the resumption of discussions under the aegis of its Conference of National Armaments Directors on a whole range of issues, such as, inter alia, submarine rescue systems and maritime environmental protection. NATO would also welcome the resumption of the technical exercises with Russia on air transportation of outsized air defence equipment and on air to air refuelling begun in 1998. And re-starting our cooperation with regard to Russian air space management entails the prospect of improved civil aviation service in Europe and Asia and financial advantages to Russia.

– The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the Partnership for Peace Programme have evolved into indispensable structures for contemporary cooperative European security. Russia should cooperate and make its voice heard in these fora too.

To conclude, I think it is fair to say that ten years after the end of the Cold War the construction of a new, lasting and stable partnership between NATO and Russia is still a «work in progress.» But if we extrapolate the progress already achieved into the next ten years to come, we will have made an enormous contribution to the security and stability of our continent. This will require time, energy and perseverance – NATO is ready to deliver that investment. □

