

With new European Security act NATO would change

Valdaiclub.com interview with Prof. Dr. Hans-Henning Schröder, Head of the Russia/CIS Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Professor for East European History at Bremen University.

Recent events have put the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the spotlight of the international media. Do you believe Israel's actions are legitimate? How can Russia and the EU help to settle the conflict in the region?

This is a big question, because it is not only about the Israeli action during the last few days, but the complex question of how to bring peace to the whole region from Iran to Egypt and the Maghreb.

The first point and I think this is most important, really we have to cooperate. We have to cooperate because it doesn't make sense to fight against one another in this region. I think Russia has better relations with someone like Hamas or Syria and other players. And the European Union has better contacts of course with Israel and also with Egypt and others. And now it would make sense to bring a concerted action to try to take some steps forward.

Of course the Israeli action is not really helpful in looking for a solution. This is something the European Union and Russia should tell them quite openly.

Russia and Germany work together in the Iran Six, which is now discussing possible sanctions against Teheran. Do you believe that sanctions are necessary and will help resolve the problem, or do you prefer a diplomatic solution?

Second, Iran touches, on the one hand, on the regional problems of the Middle East, and on the other hand, the problem of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In both cases Germany and Russia have the same interests. We have no interest in Iran emerging as another nuclear power and maybe a nuclear power that does not act rationally. Now we have the question of which is the best way to influence Iran. I'm not sure I agree with the Russian foreign minister that sanctions are really the way to influence Iran's position. I think the initiative of Brazil and Turkey to bring Iran back to the table and to try to change the Iranian position is helpful. Germany, within the framework of the EU, and Russia should cooperate in this sense.

Of course, the main question is Iranian leadership and how they react to diplomatic action. And what we've seen, at least on the Russian side, is that Ahmadinejad does not always act rationally.

The NATO concept, which former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright presented recently, refers to the European Security Treaty as a threat to the NATO alliance. Do you think the Russian president's initiative proposes an alternative to NATO, rather than a substitute?

I'm not too sure, by the way, that Albright calls the question of European security a threat to NATO. Of course if we really adopt a new European security act, I think that all of NATO would change, and not be a threat. Regarding the question of European security architecture, it is helpful that Medvedev made his proposal, but this a question that has been on the agenda since the moratorium of the CFE treaty. We have a lot of questions to solve: the question of conventional disarmament, the question of energy security, the question of human rights, the resolution of so-called frozen conflicts and the security of all the countries in Europe. There are different perceptions of who is a threat. The Baltic countries perceive Russia as a threat. In Poland, I think the situation has changed a little since relations between Russia and Poland have gotten better. In Germany, I would say no one sees Russia as a threat anymore. Of course in Russia, many people see NATO as a threat. So there is really a lot to do to create a situation where every country and every man in Europe can feel secure. I'd say Medvedev's proposal is a first step, and now we have to develop a structure to talk about it. We have the Corfu process, but this isn't enough. We should have something more political where the heads of state can talk about these questions.

I hope the visit of Medvedev and the talks with Angela Merkel can help in this sense.

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