

CHÂTEAU BÉLA

CENTRAL EUROPEAN STRATEGIC FORUM

2021 TAKEAWAYS



GLOBSEC CHATEAU BÉLA 2021

Outcome Report

Over a three-day period, GLOBSEC's annual Château Béla Central European Strategic Forum occurred along the Hungarian – Slovakian border. A collection of senior policymakers and thought leaders from Europe and the United States sphere descended for discussions on the most pressing issues facing Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This year's edition was dominated by the rupture of the current European security architecture stemming from Russia's unprovoked invasion of Europe. Against the backdrop of this new reality, participants analysed and debated a host of ultra-relevant themes. From the defence of democracy and the liberal order, sustainable support mechanisms of refugees, to the litany of foreign, economic and security policy challenges impacting CEE, there was no shortfall of topics for introspection. The fact that Europe and Europeans, are living through a watershed moment in world history was not lost on participants and is reflected in the discussion held and policy outcomes found below.



SUMMARY POINTS

Ukraine

- ▶ At every turn of this conflict, the West, and likeminded partners across the globe, must massively support Ukraine now and in the future. Clearly communicating an unwavering solidarity with Kyiv, is both an important message to Ukraine and Russia, to reiterate that it will not be business as usual after the end of hostilities.
- ▶ Ukraine must win this physical and ideological battle; it is a historic chance to defeat Putin and delegitimize the merits of international authoritarianism governance. The outcome of this struggle is inextricably linked with China and their antagonistic relationship with Taiwan. Consequently, a victory for Ukraine is a victory for Taiwan.

- ▶ In the short-term our response should continue to provide Kyiv with arms, intelligence, and humanitarian support. In concert with these initiatives, more support must be extended to increase Ukraine's national resilience, specifically in the field of cyber defence and energy.
- ▶ In the long-term a comprehensive recovery package, akin to the Marshall Plan, must be delivered, and well financed, to give Ukraine every opportunity to bounce back and remain on its Western path.

Russia

- ▶ An internal powder keg is brewing in Russia that is challenging President Putin's regime survival. While support for the war in Ukraine remains in the majority, and his removal minimal, an aggressive effort must be undertaken to communicate with Russian citizens and reiterate the West's behavior is solely directed at the government not its people.
- ▶ Deflating the Kremlin's propaganda bubble is essential. By weakening this dangerous instrument, it will limit the Kremlin's ability to wage information war and influence operations, at home and abroad, demonopolizing their control of relevant geopolitics narrative. There is an additional challenge of establishing a channel of communication with the Russian society so that it has alternative to the Kremlin propaganda.
- ▶ The worse the war gets for Moscow, potentially leading to a victory by Kyiv, represents a strategic opportunity to wipe out Russia's sphere of influence in Europe. This is a long-term exercise, but one that Europe should actively prepare for.
- ▶ Given both features, there is ample reason for the West to actively help Russia transition out of its current governance mindset and worldview.



CEE

- ▶ CEE stands on the frontline of this continental turbulence and should look to assume a larger leadership role both supporting Ukraine, but also for enabling further resilience and political solidarity in the Balkans, across NATO and the EU's Eastern flank. Satisfying the initiative can begin with the upcoming Czech Presidency of the EU that can lay the groundwork to achieve this ambition.
- ▶ CEE is not only responsible for leading on Ukraine but for the whole European Neighbourhood, which includes lobbying for visa liberalization for Kosovo, opening negotiation with North Macedonia and Albania as well as granting Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status.
- ▶ The mass influx of Ukrainian refugees across CEE poses a major administrative challenge that will test the resolve of government and society. President Putin will continue to provoke a humanitarian disaster to force capitals to pressure Kyiv to accept peace on Russia's terms. This cannot be allowed to materialize and resources from the EU must be made available to help the region cope.
- ▶ There is new spirit of cooperation among the Slavkov 3 (S3), which holds the potential to be catalyst for the revival of the EU along multiple policy priorities.
- ▶ In the coming months aligning synergies among the Czech Presidency, the V4 and the S3 will be essential to advance the centrality of the region's policy priorities.



EU

- ▶ It has taken some time, but the EU is in the early phase of a total transformation of its ethos and is learning how to speak the language of power. This continual evolution will be directly linked to its ability to establish its strategic autonomy and outline it through the strategic compass.
- ▶ The EU's geopolitical posture has changed drastically since Russia's invasion. Despite these positives, the EU must continue to hold its position, despite economic pains, and be willing to take more drastic and unpleasant choices should Russia resort to even more barbaric tactics like the use of chemical or biological weapons.
- ▶ Further EU security and defence policy is needed that complements NATO and ensures effective synergies avoids any institutional rivalry. Both reducing Western and Central Europe's dependency on Russia's gas and oil for energy security and addressing future food security

ty issues related to world wheat supplies represent policies to actively solve. Vulnerable countries, especially on the eastern flank should be eligible for assistance from the EU.

- ▶ Some voices, especially in Central Europe, call for the EU to start the accession process of Ukraine immediately, before the hostilities end, as a sign of good will on the part of the European community. Others are more reserved: although Ukraine is not in a position to join the EU fast, we must give them EU rights to help the proliferating diaspora now within EU borders. Many Ukrainian refugees in the EU possess significant added value and we must provide the platforms to allow them to help themselves and the EU.

NATO

- ▶ The gradual enlargement of the Alliance can in no way be accepted, or even contemplated, as a justifiable reason for Russia's current military action and disruption of the European security architecture.
- ▶ NATO remains Europe's primary security guarantee where the current security landscape demands immediate reinforcement of the Alliance's Eastern flank and significant investment in defence spending.
- ▶ Former promises of Allies to increase spending after the 2016 Warsaw Summit must now come to fruition given the multitude of both kinetic and non-kinetic threats to the Alliance. There is a clear role for the private sector, both traditional and non-traditional stakeholders, to increase their involvement and bolster NATO's hard security prospects as well as key topics related to resilience of critical infrastructure and supply chains.

Liberal Order

- ▶ Russia's barbaric attack should not only be viewed as a bilateral assault on Ukraine, but through a more general prism as a comprehensive attack on the basic European order and liberal international order challenging the right of states to make their own sovereign choices
- ▶ The events following Russia's invasion represent the biggest tectonic shift in the international order, signalling the end of the post-cold war era and have ushered in a new era of a divided world. Our democratic societies must accept that we are already in a state of war that extends to the information, economic, technological and cyber domains. The sooner we recognize this phenomenon the better.
- ▶ Mistakes were made in the aftermath of Crimea's annexation that led Russia to infer the fragility of Western decision making and geopolitical priorities that must not be repeated this time again.

Rapporteurs:

Roger Hilton, Host, Global Tremors
Lucia Rybníková, Junior Research Fellow,
Centre for Global Europe

