

**Central and East European Coalition**  
**20 Years: Three Perspectives on the Evolution of U.S. Strategic Engagement with Central and Eastern Europe**  
*Tuesday July 26, 2011, 4:00-6:30pm Russell 345*

**Panel I. Legislative Perspective**  
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Over the past twenty years the Central-East European (CEE) states have consistently demonstrated their importance for U.S. national and strategic interests. This has been reflected in congressional support for such initiatives as NATO enlargement, democracy promotion, visa liberalization, and a broad range of bilateral connections with individual states. However, policy makers and legislators should not conclude that the U.S. mission in the region has been completed. There are at least five concrete areas where CEE continues to consolidate U.S. global interests and needs Washington's ongoing support:

- 1. Ensuring state independence:** The sovereignty and national independence of the CEE countries remains the basis of their development as lasting democracies and U.S. allies. Moves by the Russian administration to reestablish any zone of dominance around its borders or to partition independent states must be firmly resisted. Countries closely allied to Russia or within Moscow's orbit do not make for consistent and credible U.S. allies. This does not mean that Washington's relations with Russia must be sacrificed to maintain our commitments to CEE. On the contrary, any durable relations with the Kremlin need to be based on certain core principles that include the recognition of the independence of neighbors and their free choice to enter the institutions and alliances that serve their national interests. This pertains in particular to all the former republics of the Soviet empire, including Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and Moldova.
- 2. Pursuing democratic transitions:** Many of the CEE states now serve as valuable examples of transition from authoritarian to democratic political systems, and from planned economies to market structures. Experiences in their transformation from dictatorship to multi-party parliamentarism, including constitutional reform, ensuring the separation of powers, establishing the rule of law, and pursuing civil-military reform, can be applied to aspirant democracies in North Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere where peaceful public revolts unseat autocratic leaders. Indeed, contacts between CEE activists and reformers in these regions have mushroomed in recent months and have been encouraged by policymakers in Washington. This needs to be nurtured and developed as democracy building is a long and difficult process and is susceptible to numerous pitfalls and setbacks as several CEE states have themselves experienced during the past twenty years.

- 3. Promoting regional stabilization:** The contribution of each CEE capital to establishing good relations with neighbors, and the pursuit of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, has promoted regional stability and security. The Visegrad, Baltic, Weimar, and other initiatives are valuable examples of voluntary mutual help programs that do not require a U.S. presence but can benefit from U.S. support. They are also useful models for other less secure regions such as the Western Balkans, the Black Sea region, and the South Caucasus. Above all, such initiatives demonstrate that inter-state cooperation and common problem solving between equal partners and neighbors is beneficial to all sides involved.
  
- 4. Contributing to NATO missions:** Most of the CEE states have proven their commitments to trans-Atlantic relations, particularly those that have gained membership in NATO. Additionally, several NATO aspirants, most notably Georgia and Ukraine, have contributed significantly to NATO missions or U.S.-led operations, including the mission in Iraq. Indeed, in terms of military contributions and political support, many of the new U.S. allies within NATO and new U.S. partners outside of NATO have proven to be more consistent and concrete supporters of Washington than many traditional allies and partners. This must not be forgotten as several of these countries continue to face various security threats including Russia's expansionist ambitions and need American diplomatic and political support against various pressures to reduce their statehood and sovereignty. The emplacement of the planned Missile Shield on their territories together with military equipment and infrastructure for the purposes of national defense is a visible demonstration of enduring U.S. commitment.

Additionally, ongoing cooperation in counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, combating organized crime, counter-narcotics, and other forms of joint threat reduction must continue to be enhanced with each CEE state, and high level consultations on emerging security challenges need to be pursued.

- 5. Emerging as EU players:** New EU members such as Poland are developing into significant and productive players inside the European Union and have injected strong doses of pro-Americanism into the Union. They are also asserting a constructive role in pushing for the inclusion of all West Balkan states in the EU and trying to produce a more effective Eastern Dimension toward the remaining post-communist states and seeking to prevent their state capture by anti-Western or anti-democratic interest groups. Their impact within the EU can help to maintain a strong trans-Atlantic partnership and they need to be regularly consulted to determine where U.S. and CEE interests coincide and which policies can be mutually beneficial.

In all these arenas, the U.S. executive and legislative branches must continue to work with the successful CEE democracies, encourage and assist those countries where democracy is challenged or under threat, avoid policies that would isolate any CEE state such as Belarus by making it more vulnerable to Russia's political or economic pressures, and remain committed to maintaining the national independence of all CEE and post-Soviet countries. This will help ensure that the next decade will consolidate and develop a new trans-Atlanticism as the fundamental core of America's global alliances.