

Forsvarsministerens tale: Russia and Europe. New Cold War?

Thank you for the invitation and for giving me the opportunity to offer my views on the relationship between Russia and the West.

As everybody else in this room, I would have hoped that we were in a situation equivalent to the peaceful coexistence between Russia and the West we experienced for many years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Russia has chosen a path fundamentally different from ours. A path where international cooperation has become a zero sum game.

Russia has violated international rules by its words and actions. It has denied other countries their freedom to choose.

The facts are many:

First, Russia has violated the obligations with regard to respecting the territorial integrity of Ukraine that are contained in a number of bi- and multilateral agreements – from Article 2 in the UN Charter and the Budapest

Memorandum from 1994 marking 20 years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act.

Putin has made the argument that these agreements are no longer binding. He considered the regime change in Ukraine a revolution out of which a new state emerged. The argument was obviously a political statement. It has no findings in doctrines of international law.

Every country has the right to choose its own security arrangements. All OSCE member states, including Russia, have sworn to uphold these principles.

Thus Ukraine has the right to choose its own alliances, and Russia has no right to dictate that choice – whatever it may be.

NATO has never given Russia the right to veto NATO enlargements.

Second, since the end of the Cold War Russia has never opened an exercise to **mandatory Vienna Document observation**. This practise raises tension and undermines trust.

The ZAPAD exercise is a case in point. Our so-called “observers” were only invited to a short “Visitors’ Day” – not in compliance with the Vienna Document.

Third, Russia is wilfully challenging her neighbouring countries. Heavy bombers flying in aggressive patterns. Threats of the use of nuclear weapons.

Fourth, in the cyber domain, Russia seeks to undermine our liberal Western democracies and cohesion via targeted influence campaigns and through disinformation. This is a toxic cocktail. This, we cannot tolerate.

Fifth, according to Great Britain and the US the Russian military last year organized the most destructive and costly cyber-attack in history - these attacks of NotPetya quickly spread around the world, causing billions of dollars lost in Europe, Asia and America.

We share the assessment.

Furthermore, Moscow has demonstrated an appetite for taking risks. I find it disturbing that that we now face a situation with much less dialogue between Russia and the West than during the Cold War. This adds to the equation – but it is a situation incited by Moscow.

How can we change the situation to the better?

First of all, it will be difficult. I am not overwhelmingly optimistic.

As such, strategic patience is required. It could take many years for the relationship to improve. Therefore our deterrence in NATO is key.

But in some respects I'm also an idealist. I believe in the strength of an argument. I will welcome closer engagement with Russia. We have to engage on the difficult issues.

But I'm also a realist. Dialogue is only productive from a position of strength. This is the language that Putin respects and understands. This is the approach NATO has rightfully taken.

At the moment we have to stand firm. I will not recommend going back to "business as usual" merely to improve the possibility of a better relationship. That would send a very disturbing signal to Moscow and others. And world order could very well become a victim.

Thank you for your attention. I am ready to take a few questions.