

Not one inch eastward mister President, not one inch!

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For over three years, the conflict in Ukraine, generated by Russia, has been in the news every day in the international press. With hundreds and hundreds of thousands of victims already, this conflict has marked and still marks the political life of Europe and the entire planet, but it also has repercussions in almost all areas of life for people on the old continent and beyond.

The conflict has been presented on all sides, has been analyzed and is continuously discussed in all mass media, in the press, on TV, on the Internet, but I note with amazement that in the thousands of hours and pages dedicated to this conflict, no one, at least in Romania, explains the causality that was the basis of this conflict.

A war is not a simple thing, it does not start from a game, especially when it involves one of the largest nuclear powers, and President Putin, who started the war in February 2022, does not seem to be crazy or mentally unstable, but on the contrary, he seems very aware of what he is doing.

So, the question arises: what is the cause or causes that generated this terrible military confrontation, with hundreds and hundreds of thousands of victims on both sides, and which seems to be far from stopping?

As a political geographer immersed in this profession for three decades, I have become accustomed to seeing beyond the appearances visible at first glance and to understanding that a strong leader does not start a war without at least one extremely serious motivation. In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, there are at least two motivations, which in my opinion are both extremely serious.

The first refers to the protection of ethnic Russians who inhabit the four provinces of eastern Ukraine and who suffered a strong policy of denationalization even before the year of the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, a motivation that, however, will be the subject of another essay.

The second cause: the failure to respect the agreements that the USSR had with Western powers, regarding the unification of East Germany versus the non-extension of NATO to the east.

This topic, that of the agreements between the two parties regarding the preservation of NATO within the limits it was in 1990 and the eventual transformation of this military alliance into a new form of maintaining security on the European continent, which would emphasize political elements rather than military force, is permanently avoided and is not brought up for discussion when analyzing the development of the conflict. Of course, the topic is an extremely vast one, requiring hundreds of pages of explanations and presentations of facts, discussions, agreements and diplomatic understandings less visible to the general public, but a clear conclusion can be drawn

and must be stated without doubt: the USSR was deceived by the USA/Western powers regarding ensuring its security. Of course, it is a very serious statement, but starting with the declassification of documents from the diplomatic archives found at George Washington University and in other special locations, this statement acquires the status of indisputable truth. The documents in question, also available on the Internet, are today available to the public and to researchers in the field of diplomacy and offer a wealth of evidence of the "trickery" to which the USSR was subjected during a difficult period of its existence (1990-1991).

This paper will try to highlight just a few of the diplomatic discussions held between the representatives of the two sides, discussions found in the documents exposed on the Internet. These documents underline the idea expressed so beautifully in 1990 by Secretary of State James Baker "not one inch eastward mister President, not one inch!" in the discussion with President Gorbachev. But the truth must be told, no matter how hard it may be to digest, because the truth is the only one that will set us free, as the Savior Jesus Christ says, and which will be able to help us truly understand this barbaric, merciless and terrible conflict that today consumes the lives of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of young Russians and Ukrainians.

Here are the facts recorded in the multitude of minutes or diplomatic notes that resulted from the meetings of many political leaders of the time:

Many political leaders of that period supported, in one form or another, depending on their own interests, limiting NATO's expansion eastward in the early 1990s. Here we can mention President Bush senior, US Secretary of State James Baker, former CIA Director Robert Gates, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Russian Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner and many others.

There were also many diplomatic working meetings on the topic of German unification and the non-expansion of NATO to the east, or on topics adjacent to them, at which concrete things or working principles in this direction were established. Moreover, assurances that NATO would not expand to the east were given directly or indirectly to the USSR before the end of December 1989, but especially after February 1990. We must remember here the talks in Malta in December 1989 between President George H.W. Bush and President Gorbachev, which would lay the foundation for the "Tutzing format", in the direction in which discussions took place in the first days of 1990 in Moscow between Chancellor Kohl and the Gorbachev presidencies. On January 31st, 1990 in Tutzing, Bavaria, the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher would clearly express this conditioning in the official speech related to the unification of Germany. Based on this Tunzing format, on February 10th, 1990, the meeting between German Chancellor Kohl and President Gorbachev will take place, in which they will agree on the unification of Germany in NATO as long as NATO does not expand eastward. The meeting was preceded on February 9th by discussions between the German and Soviet foreign ministers, which were also attended by Secretary of State Baker and President Gorbachev, who finalized the details of the meeting on

February 10th, details that also included the topic of German unification and NATO non-expansion. During this discussion held on February 9th, 1990, Secretary of State Baker offered the clearest guarantee, within what is called in diplomacy "a gentleman's agreement" that NATO would not expand eastward if the USSR agreed to German unification. At this meeting, the famous statement "not one inch eastward mister President, not one inch" was launched, said by Baker three times in the discussion with Gorbachev. During the same meeting, the American side confirmed that "NATO's eastward expansion is unacceptable", Baker guaranteeing Gorbachev that both he and President Bush would not accept NATO expansion if the USSR agreed to the unification of Germany within NATO.

Confirmations in the same direction were also made on May 18th, in Moscow, during the talks between Baker and Gorbachev, and the issue of German unification and implicitly its status in NATO was reaffirmed later, on July 5th in London and on July 15th in Moscow by Chancellor Kohl who guaranteed Gorbachev that NATO would change and in accordance with the London Declaration of July 5th, would become a political alliance rather than a purely military one. This idea had already been expressed on June 8th by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in London, at the meeting with President Gorbachev. Of course, although the positions of the Western alliances were consistent, there were also divergent opinions, not regarding the essence of the phenomenon but rather the details of its implementation. In the US, the State Department was attached to officially supported ideas of unifying Germany within NATO and limiting NATO's eastward expansion, but within the Department of Defense the positions were more nuanced, with the prevailing idea that "a door must be left open" for the future of Eastern European states for a possible accession to NATO.

The year 1991 brought reconfirmations for the USSR in this direction, too. In Brussels, at the meeting between NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner and the Russian delegation, Wörner once again reinforced the guarantees given by Baker, emphasizing that "...the NATO Council and he personally are against NATO expansion, 13 of the 16 members of the alliance supporting this position". Of course, for those who are interested in finding out the truth and the first real motivation of President Putin to invade Ukraine, thus stopping the possible integration of Ukraine into NATO, things are clear. President Putin's gesture is an extremely harsh one. A war, regardless of the causality that determined it, is a bad thing, very bad, which must be prevented by all means. But, probably, in President Putin's psyche, NATO's advance to Russia's doorstep represented an existential threat that had to be removed by any means. Including through war.

For this reason, military analysts and especially political decision-makers must, above all, be deeply knowledgeable about the psyche of their opponents, how they think, why they think that way and what they are capable of doing under pressure. Only by knowing these things can the relations between antagonistic forces be transformed into relations between political and, why not, economic partners. Unfortunately, the trick played by the Westerners on the Russians 35 years ago is now being paid for on the battlefield by destroyed human lives and by the bankruptcy of many European economies that support this war effort that Europe did not need. If Western leaders had

understood that Putin is not Yeltsin or Gorbachev, that you cannot play with him when the very existence of the Russian state is in the balance, this war would not have happened.

It remains to be seen what the future will bring, but the fundamental rule is to be always remembered:

when you live in the woods, you don't go to the door of a bear's den to throw rocks at it while it's sleeping. You risk waking it up, and an awakened and angry bear is never a good neighbor!