



**THE GEOPOLITICAL HOLIDAY  
HAS ENDED WITH A BANG  
ON 24 FEBRUARY 2022**



# INTERVIEW

With Jaap de Hoop Scheffer former Secretary General of NATO spoke Robert Pszczel

**I must start with the issue of Ukraine – we are speaking a few days after the anniversary of the war, the largest in Europe since 1945. What are your main feelings and observations twelve months after the start of the invasion on 24 February 2022? Has the world, or at least the security architecture, really changed beyond recognition?**

First, we are living in a completely different Europe. It is a war of aggression, one nation is using brutal force trying to subdue another sovereign nation. I am not exaggerating that historians will qualify 24/2/22 as a defining moment in Europe, Europe's 9/11. That is why the way this war is going to end is so important. Second, referring to my own children, daughters who are now in their early 40s, I have to explain to them what war means, what is a nuclear weapon. Because they were raised with a sense that freedom or sovereignty came with no price. I am a Cold War child, I worked in NATO in the Cold War in the Dutch delegation so I know that this is not true. But generations have now been educated

without the notion of war, without the notion of aggression, of rape, of tanks, of atrocities, crimes against humanity in their immediate neighbourhood. Point number three is a political one – we are in my Alma Mater, the Leiden University, where we had some trouble few years ago to initiate a discipline called war studies. You and I are both Europeans, the European DNA is peace and not war. The European project started under the heading “nie wieder Krieg!,” never again war!

**Do you mean contemporary European DNA?**

Yes, contemporary European DNA. For decades it involved a goal of building a peaceful Europe. Yes, we had the Cold War. Then came the important seizure of 1989. But then what did we do? We went on the geopolitical holiday. I tell my students here – the wall came down, a few years later there was the end of the Soviet Union, and we Europeans went to the beach, poured ourselves a nice glass of white wine, continued

to subcontract our security to the US, subcontracted our energy to Russia and subcontracted everything we did not want to make at a decent price to China. That geopolitical holiday has ended with a bang on 24 February 2022. So that is why it is, I repeat, a 9/11 moment for European history.

**In this context, do you think that Biden's speech in Warsaw spelled out the unified and appropriate response of the West?**

Yes, it did. But of course, President Biden is walking a fine line in his approach – the red line is that we do not want to run the risk of NATO having a direct military confrontation with Russia. In public we see an unprecedented solidarity at NATO and European Union. I should applaud Vladimir Vladimirovich that Americans are back in Europe in full force, NATO has considerably strengthened its eastern flank, we have Finland and Sweden on their way to NATO – so applause to Putin for what he has helped us to achieve. If you ask for my analysis of what is happening behind the scenes, if you dig a bit deeper, and I am not surprised by that, if you were to ask a question in Berlin and Paris, capitals of the two leading members of the EU - Poland may soon be one too - on how this war should end then, I

am afraid you would not get the same answer as in Warsaw, Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, London or the Hague – because as you know my country is taking a front position where it concerns Ukraine. Under the surface – and given Germany's history in particular this is more or less a given, even if I hope that this might change one day – you may hear in Paris or Berlin that the view in the more “hawkish camp” that the war will only end when the last Russian soldier has left the territory of Ukraine is unrealistic. My personal position is that I go by the assumption that this is achievable, and my strong opinion is that Ukraine should win, and not that it should simply not lose. And there is a sea change between those two expressions. Ukraine should win this conflict and we should do everything possible to make this happen.

**Everybody praises Ukrainians who have shown so far enormous courage, patriotism, and ingenuity in standing up to Russia. But how do you assess efforts of the international community? Has it done enough so far, and has it been sufficiently fast and determined? Some say that much more needs to be done to help Ukraine, why this hesitation on supply of fighter planes – do you agree with it?**

My view on the fighter planes is that Ukraine should have them.

I have supported the provision of battle tanks from the beginning of that discussion, and we will come back to the important role of Poland in this regard. But have we done enough today? My answer is that we could do more in the range of fighter planes – either by MiG29s to Ukraine and backfill with F16s, or even after (long time) training Ukrainian pilots on F16s. I have a friend who is a former commander of the Dutch air force, former F16 pilot, who told me that flying the F16 for a well-trained Ukrainian pilot is relatively easy, but managing the computer and sophisticated weapon systems takes a long time, many months in fact. So, my preference would be to start with MiGs and F16 backfill, while starting training on F16s. My government is not considering this a taboo subject, it should be considered, including providing Ukrainians with F16s once they are properly trained.

**Your views are backed by your own experience in the air force...**

Yes, I was a conscripted air force officer in my younger days. Did not fly fighter jets though.

**How would you rate NATO's performance since the beginning of**

**the war, remembering its earlier role? Avoiding a direct military confrontation with Russia but offering essential support to Kyiv. Could the Alliance have done things differently? Aren't too many Allies still playing into Moscow's hands by hyping up the escalation argument or to some extent being influenced by the nuclear blackmail? Also, the latest opinion polls in Germany show that 46% of Germans do not trust the US as an Ally and this does not sound right. So what are the reasons for all this?**

I have doubts if we could have done things better. Let's not forget that a year ago we were discussing helmets and flak jackets. Democracies are complicated machineries. And each democracy in NATO has its own history. Democratic process thus takes time, and what we want is that at the end of this war our democracies show themselves resilient. Because if they are not we may see on a wider scale what we have seen some weeks ago Berlin, demonstration with the slogan "Nicht Unser Krieg!". But this is our war!

To underline that this is our war I want to recall what I said on Dutch TV a week ago when I was asked to pick two photographs from the war which have impressed me most. The first one was of the pregnant woman from the

bombed Mariupol maternity ward, when she and her baby died on the spot. It was an example of monstrosities that take place under Putin's responsibility. The other iconic picture I chose was a photo of the apartment building in Dnipro, when the wall of an apartment was blasted and you could see a breakfast table with a bowl of fruit with apples. And I told the viewers – these are our apples, this is our breakfast table.

If we are not successful in beating this evil where Ukrainians are fighting for our freedom, where their women are raped, their houses are being destroyed, their soldiers are killed on the battlefield, the Europe we know and cherish will never return. It will be lost forever. Coming back to my notion of resilience I call on our political leaders to stand up against the opinion of those protesters in Berlin – who are of course entitled to express their views publicly – because otherwise our democracies will prove to be not sufficiently resilient. This may be relatively easy now as we have a mild winter, the Chinese economy came to the standstill over Covid, there is a lot of LNG on the world market, the reserves are quite full – but a more complicated winter may come next time.

So – yes, we have done as much as we could under our democratic

processes, remembering how far we have come from those helmets to Patriot systems supplied by the Dutch, Abrams from US, Leopards from Poland, sophisticated artillery etc. Still more needs to be done.

**This brings me to the issue of transatlantic unity, which is certainly holding, despite some problems created by countries like Hungary. But we know that it rests a lot on US leadership, which is simply indispensable. Not a surprise but still hugely impressive. Will it hold? What lessons does it have for the Alliance and international community overall?**

It has been proven again for European Allies, and you have used the term employed by the late Madeleine Albright, that the United States of America is the indispensable nation for Europe. Had not Joe Biden started from the very beginning to forge the international coalition, and let's not forget that the so called Ramstein group consists of more than 50 nations, had he not taken this initiative Ukraine might have been overrun by now. The US are the indispensable nation, and this is an important message for us Europeans.

**And I am going to ask you about this topic anyway...**



Yes and you are right to bring it up. Because Europe should not take it for granted that till the end of history the Americans will take full responsibility for our defence. I am not a big fan of the notion “strategic autonomy” in this regard because the notion lacks substance. But taking on a larger part of the financial burden and being able to project hard military power in non-article 5 scenario’s should be a European ambition.

**What are the main problems facing the West’s response to confrontation with Russia imposed on us – on Ukraine and beyond: keeping unity is one challenge. But what about implementing agreed policies (e.g., on forward defence) or changing outdated ones? Providing necessary financial resources for defence (special problem of logistics)?**

These are serious points of attention. Let us start with the most important one, that we deliver financially. I have noted with approval Chancellor Scholz’ speech on Zeitenwende but Germany is still below 2% of GDP spending on defence, despite the Chancellor claimed 100 billion euros allocated for defence. My plea would be that 2% should remain the floor but at least 3% should become the new ambition, including a timeline. I

don’t know where Poland is in this respect...

**For 2023 in Poland, we have de facto 4% level of spending on defence...**

Indeed. My key message is – practice what you preach. The same goes for logistics, implementing forward defence decisions, to have a serious strengthening of the eastern flank of NATO. Interesting thing of course Robert is, when I was active in NATO the focus was all on expeditionary forces, and now you see the pendulum swinging back to the core responsibility of NATO, which is defending the territory of the NATO area. Had you and I got the question when I was leaving NATO in August 2009 I would have never expected that this year we would be completely back to forward defence, to war on European territory.

**I will ask you about 2009 as well...**

**What about the EU? Perhaps its overall impressive performance, especially in the realm of sanctions, money for military assistance etc., is one of the biggest surprises for Putin. However, aren’t the achievements obscuring the fundamental weaknesses of European defence capabilities, resulting from years of underinvestment in defence and absence of strategic thinking?**

Of course. We were sitting on the beach until 22 February 2022. As I said we had subcontracted everything. Yes, we have been discussing strategic autonomy and we have made all kind of pleas in 2014 at the Wales summit – the 2% pledge was agreed, but was not implemented by most Allies. Do not forget that after Brexit one needs to talk about European defence and not the EU defence as only one country is left in the EU which has a serious tradition of projecting military power and that is France. So any discussion on European defence should include Great Britain. Otherwise it is rather illusory, the Brits should not of course have a *droit de regard* after Brexit on what happens within the EU, but we need them when we discuss European defence and especially what I prefer to call more strategic sovereignty.

The word war, and now I am talking about the Afghanistan mission during my time, the word *Krieg* was forbidden in Germany. It was simply not allowed. In my country we had a same kind of debate in parliament. Now, interestingly, we have the German Green party leaders who do not mince their words when it concerns Ukraine and the war, and pushing the coalition, in my view, in the right direction.

**To close this cluster of questions - you are known as a person combining enthusiasm for the European project with being a committed Atlanticist. Big progress in NATO-EU relations since you left the SG post, however would you not agree that until majority of European countries get serious about investing in real defence capabilities all the talk of “European autonomy in defence” is not just a pipe-dream, but a serious distraction?**

As I said, I am not a fan of the word autonomy, and Americans are not either, because autonomy means we will do it without you. Ukraine proves that this would be a folly, to think that we could do it without the Americans. And we, Europeans have to realize that the US President has an even more important very tense relationship to manage: superpower China. I only have to mention the two “T’s”, Tech and Taiwan and you know what I mean.

Moreover, the Americans, including the Biden administration, will ask the Europeans – where is the beef? Why is it that what the US does on Ukraine dwarfs the European effort.

**This brings me to the global topic. The recent vote in the UN showed Russia’s isolation (141 in favour of Ukraine). Still, the truth**

is that many countries on various continents simply do not see the war through the same lens as the transatlantic community. Has the West simply neglected the other parts of the world, allowing Russia and China to score some success in the game of influence? Why is it still hard to ensure that moral outrage generated by Russian neo-imperialism and war crimes is sufficiently shared by others, also by the business community (still many Western companies remain in Russia), sport associations, even celebrities (e.g. the case of Roger Waters)? We have problems convincing everybody...

Let me start with examples concerning Ethiopia and Indonesia, then India.

But first, we in the West – defined in a cultural and political sense, including Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and our friends from Latin America – we do not fully realize that on the world's stage we don't call the shots anymore. We have called the shots for centuries as the "West" but now we are first of all confronted with a two superpower world. In my whole life there was only one, thank God the US, which kept us all together. Now we have China.

Mentally and politically, we are still getting used to this new situation. I am just reading Graham

Allison's book "Destined for War". He analyses a number of scenarios in the world history when you have one ruling superpower and one rising superpower. He begins with Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece. So, we have a mental and political problem.

Apart from this adaptation process we have neglected what is called: "The Global South".

I met a junior minister from Ethiopia recently with whom I was discussing Ukraine. He told me: "Mr Secretary General – by the way, you know the title stays with you till you die, that's why one likes to travel abroad so much [*JHS laughs*] – for us in Africa the Ukraine issue is all about the grain deal, which is for us a matter of living or dying, of starvation and hunger. So it is all fine and nice that you are up in arms about the war in Ukraine, but for us food is key.

Second example.

An Indonesian civil servant telling me, when I asked him the same question you asked me about votes in the UN: you simply have to look at the map. See where we are, see where China is, and you will understand that we will not take your position lock, stock and barrel. We don't like the war, we don't like the violence, but there is more to it for Indonesia.



In other words he said – we are also in the Chinese “orbit” and please do realize that we consider ourselves a “pole” in the new multipolar world. We are an important nation ourselves, the biggest Muslim country in the world...

So, we should pay more attention to the global south. Crucially, half a year ago I would have said that I see India, China’s powerful regional rival on the subcontinent and the biggest democracy in Asia, sitting on the fence. I don’t think that is the correct analysis. Also giant India goes quite rightly from the assumption, it is a pole in the multipolar world.

The Indian colleague mentioned demography – Chinese society is greying, India might have already overtaken China in terms of a number of inhabitants.

We have to pay more attention to getting our narrative out and define our policies.

The EU does not even seem to have a consistent Africa policy. Many Europeans still somehow consider Africa as one nation – but there are fifty-four different and very divergent nations on our neighbouring continent. The Ethiopian also told me, tongue in cheek: you are very upset about changing borders of Ukraine, but you, Western Europeans, are not specifically known in Africa for not changing borders,

are you? He was a bit cynical but right.

I repeat – we need to get our narrative across, I would like to see a wider front in the UN supporting us.

**No surprise that I am going to ask you now about China – we have heard Wang Yi in Munich and in Moscow trying to sound statesmanlike, but not hiding sympathy for Russia and Chinese hard-line stance towards US. China does support Russia politically (and a bit more), even as it tries to position itself neutral – but in reality it hides its aggressive stance towards the West. Its so-called peace plan is clearly a smokescreen, not designed for any serious consideration. Is real security dialogue with China possible?**

It is difficult. Despite all the hard talk by Beijing, China will not feel too comfortable in this situation. Of course, they have their limitless bond of friendship with their “younger nephew” Putin (China being an older uncle), profiting from cheaper oil and gas and what have you. But I have no doubt that they don’t want a fight with the European Union, they don’t want sanctions, they cannot afford them. Their economy after Covid is making a restart, they really are not looking forward to punitive

sanctions. So I doubt that Wang Yi was reading the tea leaves correctly when he made his remarks in Munich and later.

Having said that, a real strategic dialogue with China right now is difficult, given their public position and their support for Russia and for the war. We will cross a dangerous bridge if, as Anthony Blinken and Bill Burns have warned, they deliver lethal weapons to Russia— and one needs to assume that Americans may have hard information that this might happen – it would be a serious development in my opinion.

On the other hand, China is now specifically mentioned in the NATO communique, so NATO cannot close its eyes to what China is doing. Good that NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, travelled to the region, to South Korea and Japan. Let's not forget that for the US China is the main theatre, not Ukraine. And Americans are entitled to NATO's support. The most recent NATO Summit communique was heavily negotiated, but it has brought China into NATO's political lenses. China remains a superpower, a highly relevant nation. But China is running the risk of shooting itself in the foot by staying so close to Putin and Russia. I may be wrong here, but

we should not be overly concerned about its rhetoric.

**Let's talk a bit about history now. Your time as SG [January 2004-August 2009] was full of big events and processes shaping the security environment even today. Post-Iraq operation divisions had to be healed, operation in Afghanistan had to be managed, US-Europe relations were, as always full of consequential moments, then there were relations with Russia, difficult as usual. First, the Afghanistan operation – with hindsight: was it right for NATO to devote so much blood, treasure and political energy to the country after 2002? I remember for example Polish President Komorowski who was critical of the out of area focus, the focus on Afghanistan operation. Or do you believe that the rather inglorious exit from the mission in 2021 has overshadowed its achievements? Your verdict? Second, what do you consider the highlights of your tenure at NATO?**

Certainly it was an inglorious exit, it was a disaster, at the end it was a self-inflicted disaster by the US. How on earth can you start with evacuating your military first, and your civilians later? It should have been the other way round. We knew the decision was coming but it was a total failure, there is no other

word for it. Also given a fact that the Taliban before the US was pulling out were not controlling any big urban centre in Afghanistan. The US had a very limited military presence, close to 10000 if I am not wrong. Why the exit? Because democracies are always short of breath. In my opinion we should have stayed. But we could not because our democracies were not up to it. The Dutch left Uruzgan long before, the hard work of Canadians in Kandahar, the Brits in Helmand, was cut short. The democracies did not have the sustaining power, the political will to sustain. All politics is local after all, as the saying goes. But two more remarks. First, I came into NATO in January 2004 as you said, with clear instructions by the Allies, Americans in particular but also President Chirac in France and Chancellor Schroeder in Germany.

SecGen, you are going to heal the wounds following the big fight over the Iraq invasion by President George W. Bush.

That solidarity and that healing process was built by Allies together, Europeans and US. I still remember vividly my friend Nick Burns as US Ambassador – solidarity was envisaged and was proven first of all by participating in the Afghanistan PRTs [Provincial Reconstruction Teams], you know

– we are going to strengthen counter-clockwise (I will never forget that expression...) with PRTs and then followed with massive military presence.

It has always been the case that all participating Allies and partners – a coalition of almost 50 nations in all in Afghanistan – have all always looked to Afghanistan through a straw. They only saw their own province. For the Dutch Afghanistan was Uruzgan, for Brits it was Helmand, the north for the Germans, and so on. This made a cohesive mission quite a challenge, with nations who were basically fighting their own war. But during my mandate, I have always operated with full support of the Allies.

If you want to hear about another crucial moment of my mission in NATO it was the very complicated summit in Bucharest in 2008. A big spat between President George W. Bush who wanted to bring Ukraine and Georgia into MAP [Membership Action Plan], so closer to NATO, and France and Germany who were dead against. This developed into a big fight and the compromise line in the communique finally was: “They will become NATO members” as you remember. Without any reference to when – when pigs fly or when hell

freezes over as the English saying goes...

There NATO made a promise on which it could not and cannot deliver. That is why I have publicly, on many occasions, voiced my opinion that that was not the right decision. Because if you think that Ukraine should be brought on the road to NATO then we knew in the years following Bucharest, even now with a war raging on, that there is no consensus for Ukraine's membership in NATO. I don't hear President Biden talking about it for example. Yes, there would be support in Poland, in the Baltic states but...

I am making this point not on the notion as such – even though Putin told me the next morning in Bucharest that I and the Allies should realize that this was an absolute no-go for Russia, not acceptable. My lesson from all this is: don't make promises on which you cannot deliver and that is relevant for the present.

Now that Ukraine has become a candidate for membership in the EU – if you look at that huge decision taken, supported by France and Germany, if you look at Moldova, an extremely vulnerable nation, which is very much on Putin's menu as we know, we should not make again promises on which we, in this case the EU, cannot deliver.

We should take these candidacies for EU extremely seriously, at the same time realising that it will take years before they can become full EU members. While I can understand President Zelenskiy, Minister Kuleba and others talking about months, it is an illusion – it will not happen so quickly. But let's take the process so seriously that we keep Ukraine and Moldova on the EU track so we keep our promise. Georgia might follow at a later stage when they have solved the internal political obstacles blocking their EU candidacy.

**To challenge you a bit on this matter – the argument could be inverted. Some of policy prescriptions, starting with analysis, from Central East Europeans (CEE) have not been listened to. The Polish CHOD called this approach in an interview for PPD a desire on the part of some countries to stay in “an intellectual comfort zone”. Following Russian war on Georgia in 2008 there was such a strong push to go back to “business as usual with Russia”. Speaking of Bucharest – Putin had this extraordinary speech there calling Ukraine an artificial state. All the evidence, including his Munich speech, was there. Recently your successor Rasmussen in his interview mentioned Putin telling him that his job**



as SG should be to dissolve NATO. The point being that CEE had the right view of the threats and, more importantly they had elements of the right prescription, but the patronising approach was there and still is.

Yes, such approach is still there. But I think I know why it is still there. Poland was right, the CEE countries were right, the Baltic states were right. But now we come to the realm of threat perception. And in France, in Spain, even here in the Netherlands, there was and there is to a large extent a very different threat perception. Russia is

far away, though not now – you were right and we were wrong on this, but politicians here have to live with that threat perception. The truth is that we do not know much, and it is partly the result of our education system, about the history of the CEE area.

For generations we have simply not heard about you. In my formative years it was all black – there was a wall and a curtain and there were poor people behind that wall. I vividly remember those pictures. It was far away; it was not us. Then the wall fell, and we were all



applauding, we had a greater Europe, whole and free (we thought). But in our education the history of the Czech Republic, of Slovakia, Poland, of the Baltic states, was and is not well known. This should be seen in combination with the different threat perception and the belief, which I mentioned before that security and peace are for free...

You the Poles, and other nations in CEE, have the experience we simply do not have in this part of the world. Look at those hundreds of student outside the room we are sitting in, that is a generation which will have to be educated because they will soon be at the helm and making decisions. So, I don't think that for them this a matter of comfort zones or intellectual liberty.

If NATO had gone into that debate during the Bucharest summit with a sense of consensus on MAP for Ukraine and Georgia it should have done so. But the consensus was simply not there. Anyway, it is a combination of threat perception and history. It is too easy to qualify it as comfort zones. This generation is waking up with a big bang on what is happening in Ukraine. Political leaders in Europe – not in Warsaw, Riga, Vilnius, or Tallinn, because you are telling us: we have told you so, but we did not listen.

**But politically I would suggest that this is educational process has to be quick. Because this not just a lack of knowledge, and CEE should not be a mystery to other Europeans anyway. But there are also hard facts, this is getting serious and they are to do with defence spending, the support to Ukraine – the country like Estonia is spending 1% of GDP on military assistance, Poland is raising its defence budget to 4%, sending over 300 tanks etc. is. And to put it rather bluntly – and we are not speaking only of CEE, one can easily add Finland and Sweden to that mix – for whom winning the argument on policies is not only about an intellectual aspect, but it is a matter of such existential importance, that the region will push extremely hard, the nations concerned will not agree with wrong policies. So, are we heading towards some kind of confrontation that nobody wants? From the public rostrum we are all united, but as you have explained earlier things look rather different under the surface. So how do we square this circle?**

Well, that is a very complicated question. Only a year and a half ago a private businessman started a campaign to convince the Dutch to spend more on defence, when they were spending 1,2% of GDP. In this same room I gave an

interview and I felt that I was alone in a desert with my claim for 2% spending, there were many people against it in our societies and the Dutch were no exception. I said hundreds of times during my 5 years in NATO that Putin had a European policy, but NATO had no Russia policy. The Bucharest meeting in 2008 proved that this is true, and we are still proving it as we speak. Putin knows it, he knows which card he should play vis-à-vis Paris and Berlin, and which one vis-à-vis Warsaw, Tallinn or London. On this side of Europe we will have to learn that the centre of gravity within the EU, and to some extent within NATO, is shifting eastwards. So Poland is now a much more important player than it was before this war. Look at the stream of visitors going to Warsaw, the US President has been there twice in one year.

So it is crystal clear that the Polish voice has more weight now – before the war the still important issues were about the rule of law and other complicated intra-EU discussions, on the judges, on the PiS government policy. These are important discussions. If we talk about democracy, it is democracy in every sense of the word so Poland should not be “off the hook” in this domain.

But we have the war now and the Polish role which is crucial, and this asks for our permanent attention. The centre of gravity is shifting eastwards and this generation will learn the lesson, and I am learning a lesson, because I am a Cold war child. I was also an optimist with President George H. W. Bush with his “Europe, whole and free”, “hip, hip hooray”, the wall has fallen; Francis Fukuyama’s the end of history and so on. But history is back in its full force.

**I would love to talk to you for another hour, but I promise you that this will be my last question. It concerns the job that you held, with great distinction. My humble view, and it is not because I am interviewing you, NATO has been blessed, it has been lucky, to have great leadership throughout its history. But since we are talking about CEE the most obvious question of all: you and I know that there are not that many high-ranking positions in NATO or EU that are currently held by CEE citizens. Has the time come for a Secretary General from the region?**

Why not...

Because there are some voices saying it is still too early, even though Spain for example had an SG very soon after it joined the Allian-

**ce. It is part of what some believe is a form of paternalism...**

I am not going to name names but I could easily name a number of people from the region who in my opinion would fully qualify for that job in NATO. Definitely. The discussion has started about the succession to Jens Stoltenberg - who is doing a great job in what is a huge crisis and he is mastering this crisis with the greatest skills and I sincerely applaud him, champagne to Jens, because I know how hard it is. There is a Crisis with a capital C and War with capital W. So, my firm answer is: why not. We have just had two Nordics in

succession, before them it was me from Western Europe, before me Lord Robertson from UK, Solana from Spain. Solidarity in your part of Europe is also important.

**One hopes that there would a candidate from the whole region, but from your point of view there should not be any opposition to the very idea of SG from CEE.**

Absolutely, I do not see any reason why that should be the case.

**I enjoyed immensely talking to you, huge thanks for answering all the questions. Dank U!**