

Stability means Security

by Bohdan Klid

While much attention was being focused on Russian-NATO relations recently, a remarkable flurry of diplomatic activity was taking place in east-central Europe, in the grey area of relatively weak countries between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization states and Russia.

The same day that Russia signed its agreement with NATO, the presidents of Poland, Ukraine and the three Baltic republics, held a summit in Tallin, Estonia, to discuss security and other matters. In a joint statement, the five leaders praised the NATO-Russian accord, but at the same time stressed that NATO should remain open to new members in the future.

This summit was but one event in a series of recent diplomatic breakthroughs, all of which involve Ukraine. On June 2, Romania and Ukraine signed a friendship treaty that acknowledges existing borders between the two states. Some of western Ukraine had been part of Romania between the world wars, and Bucharest had been reluctant to unequivocally acknowledge these territories as Ukrainian.

Two weeks ago, Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski and Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma signed a historic "Declaration of Understanding and Reconciliation." The statement acknowledged mutual wrongdoings in the past, seeking to overcome a centuries-long legacy of Polish-Ukrainian mistrust, conflict and bloodshed going back to the seventeenth century. The declaration referred to the two countries as "strategic partners" and to their common goal of joining a united Europe.

Most significantly, a diplomatic breakthrough has finally taken place between Kyiv and Moscow. Many of Russia's leading politicians have been reluctant to confirm Ukraine's territorial integrity since Ukraine gained independence in 1991. A Russo-Ukrainian friendship treaty prepared in 1994, therefore, had remained unsigned.

But last week, the Russian and Ukrainian governments solved most outstanding issues between them and signed the treaty. Russia now recognizes existing borders, thus setting aside potential territorial claims against Ukraine and reaffirming its independence.

These diplomatic successes bode well for the security of the countries of east-central Europe, particularly Ukraine. Importantly,

the developing entente among Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states will allow these countries more freedom of action and strengthen their ability to counterbalance Russian political and economic pressures.

When the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and the Soviet Union collapsed, many pundits feared that the east-central European states would unravel or become embroiled in inter-ethnic conflicts. This has not happened. What has occurred is that these countries have taken advantage of the waning of Russian power and the expansion of NATO to make historic and pragmatic compromises with one another, thus strengthening their security.

The current Russian leadership, to its credit, has seemingly accepted these changes. In the past, east-central Europe has been fought over and dominated by its more powerful neighbours, traditionally Germany and Russia. The weaker states had often quarreled with and fought one another. Disunited and weakened, they became easier prey for domination.

This legacy now appears to have been overcome. Although Poland is due to enter NATO, its leaders realize that, to be really secure Poland must cooperate closely with its non-NATO neighbours to the east, which includes promoting their security and sta-

bility. This has led to a vigorous Polish *Ostpolitik*, the most important focus of which has been the development of close ties with Ukraine, including economic agreements.

The Poles and Ukrainians have much to gain by deepening their economic links. The two are currently completing negotiations on a free-trade agreement and visa-free travel. Together, they have about 90 million people. Both want to develop potentially lucrative Baltic-Black Sea transportation and energy supply routes.

The potential benefits of increased trade have been recognized by all sides, including Russia. In addition to the political agreements reached with Ukraine, Russia agreed to remove barriers between the two countries, thus reviving old connections.

At their summit in Estonia, the Polish, Ukrainian and Baltic presidents called for "north-south European economic integration." It appears that the east-central European states are poised to follow up on diplomatic successes by boosting economic cooperation with one another. Such developments should only solidify the prospects for long-term stability and security in the region.

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