

## The creation of new alliances

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The collapse of Communism within the Eastern bloc and the break-up of the Soviet Union put an end to the Cold War. The new regimes soon declared their intention to turn to the countries of Western Europe for the necessary economic aid and assistance to facilitate the transition. The aspiration for ownership and modernity embodied by the European Union was a driving force behind the transformation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs). But the European Union, tasked with this historic mission, also had to work to offer these states the prospect of access to its area of peace and prosperity, along with the means and method that would open up this area for them. The fall of the iron curtain also paved the way for the reunification of Germany and then of the whole of Europe. Europe's infrastructures also had to be enlarged and transformed so that they would be better suited to the new political order in Eastern Europe. From the end of the 1990s, the two former Cold War enemies embarked on a process of disarmament. The negotiations led to the signing of agreements for the progressive reduction of the number of conventional and nuclear weapons on European soil. Relations between the United States and the Russian Federation also began to normalise and the two countries embarked on bilateral negotiations on strategic arms reduction.

Finally, on 1 July 1991 in Prague, the seven member countries of the Warsaw Pact (USSR, Bulgaria, Romania, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia) decided to dissolve the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact.

With the collapse of the Communist camp, which strengthened the conversion to Western values (political pluralism, market economy, the primacy of law), the role of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) could increase. At the request of Mikhail Gorbachev, a revival took place that was intended to consolidate democracy and accelerate disarmament. The Summit of the Heads of State or Government held in Paris on 19–21 November 1990 adopted the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, recalling the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The Charter welcomed the end of an 'era of confrontation and division' and proclaimed the desire to 'build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government'. It was decided at the Summit to make the CSCE into a permanent institution, without extending its powers and responsibilities. This would be achieved at the CSCE Council in Budapest in December 1994 with the creation of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The **Visegrad Group** was created with the aim of moving away from Communism and implementing the reforms required for full membership of the Euro-Atlantic institutions. It was established on 15 February 1991 at a meeting attended by József Antall, Prime Minister of Hungary, Lech Wałęsa, President of Poland, and Václav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, in the Hungarian town of Visegrád. Following the division of Czechoslovakia into two separate States on 1 January 1993, the Czech Republic and Slovakia became the third and fourth members of the group. The 'Visegrad Triangle' (Budapest, Prague and Warsaw) therefore became the 'Visegrad 4' or 'V4' (Budapest, Bratislava, Prague and Warsaw). These four countries developed close political and economic cooperation so that they would be better equipped to defend their common interests at European level. The concerted action of V4 rapidly contributed to the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact, the dissolution of Comecon and the consolidation of the transition to democracy.

One of the aims of the Visegrad Group was to stimulate trade between the signatory States. To this end, on 21 December 1991 in Kraków, the Heads of State or Government signed the

Central European Free Trade Agreement (**CEFTA**), which came into force on 1 March 1993.

The countries of the former Warsaw Pact, concerned about the stability of their frontiers because of the revival of nationalism in Central Europe and a possible resurgence of Russian imperialism, needed a credible guarantee and found it not in the OSCE or in the European Union but in **NATO** and, through it, the United States. The Visegrad Group countries also asked to be formally integrated into NATO and affirmed, on 6 May 1992, that ‘their long-term objective was full membership of NATO’.

But there was no question of expanding the Atlantic Alliance towards Eastern Europe, since that would upset Russia. NATO adopted a new strategic concept.

There was no longer a global military threat in Europe. The danger now lay in regional conflicts arising from economic, social and political issues as well as from those concerning defence. This resulted in the need, while still maintaining the potential for collective defence, to develop dialogue and cooperation in order to contribute — along with the other organisations — to the peaceful resolution of the crises which were threatening European security. This resulted in the creation, on the initiative of the United States and Germany, of a North Atlantic Cooperation Council (**NACC**), which, on 20 December 1991, began to organise periodic meetings of ministers, ambassadors and military experts to discuss defence and security issues. The number of Member States began at 25 (the 16 from NATO, Russia representing the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and the three Baltic states). It expanded with the inclusion, in March 1992, of 11 other republics from the new Commonwealth of Independent States, to which were added Albania and Georgia. There were 38 members in total. Cooperation developed in all areas and intensified against the background of the Partnership for Peace (11 January 1994), which aimed to establish military cooperation with NATO (planning, joint exercises) in order to improve the capacity to successfully carry out United Nations and CSCE/OSCE peacekeeping missions, through the setting up of combined joint task forces at international level. This partnership, it was hoped, would play a crucial role in the process for the enlargement of NATO as now envisaged by the Alliance governments. This enlargement was to take place progressively, several years later. On 27 May 1997, in Paris, the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation was signed, creating the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council.

All these events clearly demonstrated that the struggle between East and West was a thing of the past and that the Cold War between the two superpowers had come to an end.