



“Twenty Years Past, Twenty Years Forward; Perspectives for Central and Eastern Europe”, Bucharest September, 10th 2009

Under the auspices of the Aspen Institutes International Committee meeting organized in Bucharest in September a panel debate was organized in order to explore *“the changes that started twenty years ago and irreversibly shaped Europe and the world’s perspective.”*

The speakers included a number of reputed contributors to foreign and security policy, current and former government figures, business people and economists as well as a number of particularly well suited Aspen members representing most of the Institutes in the Network. The debate was introduced by **Mircea Geoană**, President of Aspen Romania and moderated by **Walter Isaacson**, President and CEO of the Aspen Institute the speakers for the first panel were: **Pablo García-Berdoy**, Former Ambassador of Spain to Romania, **Marta Dassu**, Director General for International Activities, Aspen Institute Italia, **Emil Hurezeanu**, President of the Realitatea-Catavencu Group, **Charles King Mallory**, Executive Director, Aspen Institute Deutschland, **Gianni de Michelis**, Former President of Aspen Institute Italia, **Vladimir Socor**, Senior Fellow, The Jamestown Foundation, The second panel speaker were: **Stephen Biegun**, Corporate Officer, and Vice President, International Governmental Affairs, Ford Motor Company, **Daniel Dăianu**, former Member of the European Parliament, **Mario Moretti Polegato**, President, GEOX S.p.A., **Robert K. Steel**, Chairman, The Aspen Institute, **Claudio Zito**, CEO, ENEL

“From the historic time line of 1989 the panel attempted an agenda-setting reflection on what to expect from the coming decades in term of Europe’s economic and political course, with an emphasis on long-term consequences of the present economic crisis”. The participants and guests were equally impressive, representing Romanian academia, government, business, media and an important part of Aspen Institute Romania’s members.

Following are the key elements of the debate and some of the important conclusions and possible directions of follow-up agreed by the panelists. The results of the debate, reading materials and articles as well as a set of matching articles, research pieces and interviews from Aspenia and other Aspen Institutes’ publications will make the basis for an Aspen Romania anniversary publications tentatively titled “Wall to Wall”.

Twenty years after the reshaping of world order, we find ourselves at a crossroads again, our illusions of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous world shattered by conflict in Asia, crisis afflicting the powerful Western economies, emerging threats and institutional inadequacy. “Where do we go from here?”, was the question politicians, academics, CEOs and journalists attempted to answer, in the framework of the Aspen Institute Romania debate on “**Twenty Years Past, Twenty Years Forward; Perspectives for Central and Eastern Europe**”, on September 10, 2009.

“Twenty years ago, we missed the point. We didn’t fully understand the consequences and choices ahead”, former Italian Foreign Minister **Gianni de Michelis** said. “Democracy and the market economy were not winning, the world was not unipolar”, he added. “We misread ‘89 because we were too Eurocentric; in fact there were other ‘89s as well: Tienanmen (great powers being able to use economic power without democracy); Khomeini and the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan. These other ‘89s are back now as a vengeance. We are either able to deal together with these other ‘89s or the West will be over!”, claimed **Marta Dassu**, Director for International Affairs of Aspen Italia.

As summed up by Aspen Romania Chairman and Romanian Senate Speaker **Mircea Geoană**, participants agreed that, as was also the case in 1989, the current crisis makes visible the symptoms of long-creeping unresolved problems and that the way we face these challenges today will shape the world of tomorrow.

The supremacy of the West has come into question, there is a reshuffle of the global order, the economic crisis marks a political and cultural redistribution of force relations among civilizations and continents. Against this background, emerging powers like China, Russia or, regionally, Turkey, are vying for a more assertive role in the international arena. As the invisible hand of the state becomes more and more visible worldwide, the marked difference in the respective systems of values of these countries by comparison to the West adds one more challenge to the ideas of the supremacy of civil rights and of a free market. How do we build a new collective security order to accommodate such diverse *Weltanschauungs*?, is the question that arises.

Institutional responses have varied from a full-fledged rethinking of the role of existing super state organizations such as NATO, or the EU (**Walter Isaacson**) and deciding between further enlargement (**Marta Dassu**) or deeper integration and internal consolidation (**Pablo Garcia-Berdoy**), to capitalizing on the existing framework and making a gradual transition to more adequate structures (**Garcia-Berdoy**).

Geopolitical approaches have also spanned the full range of options, from integrating Russia (and to a lesser degree Ukraine), which has less economic clout, but considerable disruptive potential, into a new European security order where it could play a constructive role and not feel threatened (**Charles King Mallory IV**) to protecting the integrity of the decision-making mechanism in NATO and the EU from a Russian voice that would de facto translate into a vote, increasing US troops presence in Europe’s East and reassessing the potential for conventional conflict initiated by national state actors

(**Vladimir Socor**) or strengthening the Mediterranean component (**Gianni De Michelis**) and getting Turkey on board (**Marta Dassu**).

On the ideological and social side, a deeper reflection needs to take place regarding the right balance between self interest and the larger interest, following the rather nationalistic response to the crisis by certain EU member states. At the same time though, we need to compromise on currently contentious issues such as labour mobility or visa liberalization.

Romania is itself directly affected by these fundamental changes, panelists stated. It can be the entry point, the regional hub of an East-West cooperative structure as long as it learns to look East as well as West, engage Russia while continuing to advocate freedom for its neighbors and continued EU/NATO enlargement (**Mircea Geoană**). Or it can stand right next to the East-West dividing line crossing the Black Sea, a space of increasing insecurity (**Vladimir Socor**). Its chances are however determined by three essential choices: long-term vision instead of short-term reaction (**Emil Hurezeanu**), being an active contributor to the emerging configuration, not a passive recipient and putting its resources and energy into building a strong economy, without which it is doomed to be vulnerable and peripheral (**Mircea Geoană**).

Major investors in Romania, such as Ford Company and Enel (VP **Steve Biegun** of Ford and Country Manager of Enel **Claudio Zito**) expressed their optimism regarding the perspectives for growth of the Romanian economy despite the historical misfortunes and current crisis. At the same time, Romania can serve as a powerful example to neighboring countries and also help Western institutions stay engaged (“Western institutions are not threatening unless they stop growing” – **S. Biegun**).

On the broader economic front, Professor **Daniel Dăianu** believes the US and the EU need to come to an agreement on the underpinnings of free market regulation and financial supervision. A decent capitalist society needs regulation, he said, adding that, as regards solidarity within the EU, the Lisbon Treaty would not bring about any fundamental changes in the absence of a broad compromise on the problems afflicting Europe. “This is no time for petty issues”, Aspen Chairman **Bob Steel** warned. “The crisis has hit harder people at the lower end and unemployment, stable work and low inflation, which we thought were the Holy Trinity of our economic model, have proven volatile. The priority is to make sure financial institutions are stable and keep working for everyone!”, he concluded.