



Prominent international gathering—here, the first working session.

Minsk Security Conference: Give the pragmatists a chance!

The International Conference on Eurasian Security in Minsk is not quite as prominent as the Munich Security Conference, nor does it enjoy the media attention of its rival event in Bavaria. However, it takes place in a location where history has already been made, namely in the Belarusian capital of Minsk, where the Minsk Agreements were signed, which were supposed to end the Ukraine conflict. The fact that this did not happen was certainly due in part to some of the participants at the Munich Security Conference...

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Thu 20 Nov 2025

That is no reason to give up: anyone who breaks off talks is burying the hope for peace, said Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó in his speech at the opening of the conference in Minsk. The record participation of delegates from 48 countries gives reason to be confident that at least Eurasia will bring some structure to the prevailing global disorder (1). Hungary's historical experiences also play a role here. Szijjártó reported that his country lost about two-thirds of its territory and population in two world wars, but that the people of Hungary lost almost 40 years of their lives before conditions became livable again. In what is probably the most critical security situation since World War II, he and Eurasian diplomacy deserve a chance: they will certainly not do worse than their colleagues in Munich.

In addition to the host Belarus, Hungary, Russia, Myanmar, and North Korea were also represented at a high level by their foreign ministers. China was represented by its Special Envoy for Eurasian Affairs, while Iran, India, and Tajikistan were represented by their deputy foreign ministers. Also interesting was the participation of Nino Burjanadze, who served twice as acting president of Georgia. In addition, the secretaries-general of important international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Eurasia (CICA) were present. At the ambassadorial level, Switzerland, Pakistan, and Slovakia, among others, were represented. First and foremost, however, the Minsk Security Conference was a meeting of independent experts, university lecturers, and diplomats at the working level. In addition to numerous institutes and think tanks from the post-Soviet space and Asia, the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP) and the US-based Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft were represented from the West.

High relevance

After all, the conference participants are likely to represent a good half of the world's population. The majority of the world's nuclear powers and some of the world's most dangerous conflict zones are located in this region. The Indian representatives in particular showed confidence by greeting the audience on behalf of one-sixth of the world's population. They also see themselves in the fast lane compared to the EU, which years ago was an extremely secure and competitive economy based on a high level of technology and cheap energy. Both of these factors have changed dramatically over the past few years (2). Szijjártó's question as to why Brussels believes that after 19 ineffective packages of sanctions, the 20th will now bring the hoped-for success was therefore not entirely unjustified.



Panelists in Minsk; on the left, Aleksei Shevtsov from Russia's National Security Council; on the right, General Rajendra Singh Yadav from India. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus

Statements claiming that the conference does nothing to end the war in Ukraine, which were circulated last year by particularly zealous fighters against disinformation, discredit the originator himself, because Western Europe in particular would have to take action to end the war. However, it will not do so as long as Ukraine is still able to fight (3). Viewed in this light, the absence of official representatives from Western Europe at the Minsk Security Conference is very telling, and the existence of the Ukraine conflict itself testifies to the collapse of the Euro-Atlantic security system. What is cause and what is consequence here is a matter of debate. In any case, the problems underlying the conflict will have to be addressed independently of this question (4).

Difficult journey

The problems encountered by numerous participants from the West on their journey to the conference were symptomatic: the border crossings between Poland and Belarus had been completely closed since the military exercises on both sides of the new Iron Curtain in September. A reopening has been announced. The border crossing from Lithuania to Belarus is basically open, although the Lithuanian side is doing everything it can to discourage travelers from traveling to Belarus. On the day before the conference, Vilnius Airport and the Kamenny Log border crossing were temporarily closed, allegedly because balloons had flown into Lithuanian

airspace from Belarus. It was virtually impossible to independently verify this report; the only thing that is clear is that the wind was blowing mainly from the south during those days. The question of why Belarus would make it difficult for Western experts and diplomats to travel there, given that it attaches so much importance to their presence, also remained unanswered. Attending such conferences is always a political issue, and the Belarusian side expressed its suspicion that this was precisely the reason for making it difficult for Western participants to travel there. The truth is perhaps much more mundane: according to Belarusian police officers, smugglers like to use drones and balloons for their activities. The circumstances of the Cold War have been reversed in recent years: today, it is the West that is making travel across the new Iron Curtain more difficult.

Alliance of Pragmatists

The foreign ministers of Belarus and Russia, Maxim Ryzhenkov and Sergey Lavrov, took the opportunity to present their joint charter for diversity and multipolarity in Eurasia, which they had drafted and signed following last year's conference (5). It could develop into a set of rules for resolving conflicts in the Eurasian region. Whether the Eurasia Charter will eventually replace the 1975 Helsinki Final Act will depend largely on the behavior of Western Europeans. Sun Linjiang, China's special envoy for Eurasia, made it clear that the states of Eurasia will not allow themselves to be dictated to when it comes to resolving conflicts. He did not mention that non-interference in the internal affairs of the participating states remains an ironclad principle. This is a prerequisite for states with a wide variety of political systems, both democratic and authoritarian, to be able to work together. In the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), this spirit of cooperation has long since evaporated.

Sergey Lavrov made it clear that a Eurasian group of states will emerge by criticizing the lack of a pan-continental structure on the Eurasian continent that would stand above the existing regional structures. In this group, no one will take orders from anyone else. It will therefore be nothing more than an informal alliance of pragmatists. At present, this all sounds rather academic, but it became clear at the conference that the governments involved want to turn it into something concrete with tangible effects in the areas of foreign policy, diplomacy, economics, and military affairs. A corresponding side event organized by the Collective Security Treaty Organization clearly demonstrated this. However, the formation of an offensive-minded “anti-NATO” is not to be expected, because Russia cannot expect support from its Eurasian partners in the attack on Western Europe that is currently so popular in Western discussions. Belarusian President Alexander

Lukashenko made this clear in his opening speech: his country has no interests in Poland or Lithuania and cannot compete militarily with its neighbors, but it will cause them unacceptable damage if they take action against Belarus. This was not a threat, but a clear statement from the strong man in Minsk. Will it be heard in Brussels?

A “regional UN”?

After the opening remarks by the officials, it was time for the Western think tanks to have their say. The statement by the representative of the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP) that trust between the West and Russia in particular must first be restored before the war in Ukraine can be ended seemed somewhat academic, perhaps even helpless. After years of information warfare, the atmosphere has become so toxic that even holding talks with the other side is seen as treason, and it is unlikely that Western decision-makers can afford to be photographed shaking hands with the supposed devil. The GCSP's statement that the OSCE, with its extensive experience in monitoring the ceasefire in Ukraine, could continue to play an important role in the future was also rather theoretical. Although the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission did indeed use innovative technical means to monitor the Minsk ceasefire, there were too few of them and they came too late (6).

The concept of the Quincy Institute, which calls for a kind of Eurasian UN with a body similar to the UN Security Council, composed of equal numbers of representatives from the West and the East, seems only slightly more realistic. Such a body would also have to reflect the realities in Eurasia today. Rather than creating a regional UN that attempts to resolve conflicts with the power of its permanent members, it might be better to identify potential trouble spots, recognize states that are interested in a settlement, anticipate possible coalitions, and then commission military contingency planning. A “regional UN” would probably quickly prove to be a flawed construct, like its model: it would fare like the UN Security Council, which was unable to function at the beginning of the Cold War because ideological differences gained the upper hand after the common enemy, the Axis powers, had been defeated (7). However, a body with the function of an arbitration tribunal, which would have to assess the positions of the parties to a conflict under international law, can only function if it is composed of pragmatists, because otherwise influences that are alien to the underlying problems will come into play. Without an arbitration tribunal, however, all deliberations of a Eurasian Security Council that is to be created will become a pure power game. An alliance of ideologues and pragmatists would probably only become active when a danger

arises that threatens the existence of all. Smaller conflicts that are dangerous for those affected would quickly become politicized in such an environment and lead to proxy wars that would keep the continent in suspense. We know this from Africa.

Give the bridge builders from Budapest a chance

The question of the Trump-Putin summit, which has been postponed for the time being, hung over the entire conference. In Minsk, however, this came as a surprise to very few. Foreign ministers, and even more so heads of government and state, only meet when success is guaranteed and an agreement is ready to be signed. We are probably a long way from that because the complexity of the Ukraine conflict is simply being underestimated. The constant Russophobic war cries represent nothing more than intellectual capitulation. A mere ceasefire would be easy to achieve, but the Kremlin wants more, namely a combined construct of a ceasefire and a peace treaty that goes further than the three Minsk agreements and includes guarantees for compliance with the ceasefire. This is an ambitious project. Now Western Europe is paying the price for having focused unilaterally on military solutions for years. If Paris, Berlin, London, or Brussels could now present a convincing offer, Europe would be able to resume the leadership role it has been claiming for years. Such an offer would have to include concessions by Western Europe on European security, i.e., address Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO and regulate the monitoring of a ceasefire. The way the OSCE did this with its special monitoring mission was far from sufficient.

Quite apart from that, Trump and Putin have already discussed substantial issues in telephone conversations. It would be entirely understandable if such a summit meeting were to be treated confidentially between the US and Russia for the time being and took place somewhere in the border region between the two countries, be it in the Far East of Russia—Vladivostok, perhaps—or once again in Alaska. The White House and the Kremlin should not give Western Europeans any leverage to sabotage the meeting. Poor Europe – left out again! Szijjártó and Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán will take it in stride: their role as bridge builders between West and East is undisputed.

Notes:

1. See Lorenzo Maria Pacini: *The Third Minsk International Conference on Eurasian Security charts the course for a multipolar continental strategy*, at *The Telegraph*, 01.11.2025, online at <https://telegra.ph/The-Third-Minsk-International-Conference-on-Eurasian-Security-charts-the-course-for-a-multipolar-continental->

strategy-11-01 und <https://t.me/c/2220879823/651>. For last year's conference, see “Eurasien organisiert sich selbst, während Europa sich kastriert“, at Global Bridge, 08.11.2024, online at <https://globalbridge.ch/eurasien-organisiert-sich-selbst-waehrend-europa-sich-kastriert/>.

2. Whether the West's years of *bashing* Donald Trump or the US's high foreign trade deficit with the EU are the reason for the new, high tariffs on European imports into the US remains to be seen.

3. See „Die Sicherheitskonferenz des Kremls in Minsk hat den Frieden nicht gefördert“, at EUvsDisinfo, 22.11.2024, online at <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/de/die-sicherheitskonferenz-des-kremls-in-minsk-hat-den-frieden-nicht-gefoerdert/>. The authors also either misplace the location of the Kremlin or deliberately set out to offend 9 million Belarusians.

4. This was explicitly demanded by Sun Linjiang, China's special envoy for Eurasia, in his opening speech.

5. See the website of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at https://mfa.gov.by/en/press/news_mfa/a7cd40e20e562b10.html.

6. The author experienced this himself as *Senior Planning Officer* of the mission in the fall of 2014 and in subsequent years in a supporting role.

7. The Cold War began at the latest with the announcement of the so-called Truman Doctrine in March 1947, which was made in response to the situation in Greece. See “March 12, 1947: Announcement of the ‘Truman Doctrine,’” at the Federal Agency for Civic Education, February 29, 2024, online at <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/506079/12-maerz-1947-verkuendung-der-truman-doktrin/>

ARTICLE TAGS:

Szijjártó, Péter Belarus India Iran North Korea Russia Hungary Myanmar Tajikistan
Pakistan Switzerland Georgia Slovakia Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)
Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Eurasia (CICA)
Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP) Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
Lavrov, Sergey Shevtsov, Aleksei Yadav, Rajendra Singh Ryzhenkov, Maxim Lithuania
Poland Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Putin, Vladimir EU
NATO Orban, Viktor Analysis