

# Putin confronts NATO at Bucharest Summit

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Global Research, April 04, 2008

4 April 2008

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

## No Munich in Bucharest

04/04/2008 21:58 MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti political commentator Dmitry Kosyrev) – Those who followed the NATO summit in Bucharest had every reason to expect a “second Munich,” that is, one more address in which President Vladimir Putin would tell the global audience what Russia thinks of the West’s attitude to it.

But there was no Munich in Bucharest, and it had not been planned. Drafting his last presidential speech before a major world forum, Putin intended from the very start to balance out Russia’s discontent with NATO’s actions with its proposals on future relations between the two sides.

The Munich conference was a relatively open forum unlike the Bucharest meeting. This time, Putin did not deliver a public speech. He addressed the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, which his presence turned into a summit. The media were groping for information about Putin’s speech. One of the sources was NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer; others were from the Russian delegation.

So, what did the Russian president talk about? Here is the first half of his speech about Moscow’s grievances. He called the extension of the alliance a “direct threat” to Russia – a very serious warning. Russia does not have the right of veto, and it is not seeking it. States should be able to hear each other’s concerns without any vetoes. NATO should not ensure its security at the expense of the security of other countries, Russia included. NATO is a military alliance, and as such it should display restraint in the military sphere. If NATO continues approaching the Russian borders, Moscow will take “necessary measures.” Russia has seen repeated violations of international law – it is enough to mention the bombing of Yugoslavia, or Kosovo’s unilateral recognition.

As we see, there are no sensations, everything is obvious. Now let’s turn to the second half of the speech, where Putin voiced Russia’s proposals for cooperation with NATO. Having suspended the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) last December, Russia is ready to resume it on the basis of reciprocity. The Iranian problem should be resolved on the basis of transparency – hardly anyone can imagine Iran attacking the United States. Instead of cornering the Iranians, the world community should find another approach. NATO and Russia could cooperate on Afghanistan. He spoke highly about the participation of warships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean, and pointed out that for Moscow cooperation with NATO is an informed choice.

This is about all, or at least the main points. Not a single sensation – Russia has been telling NATO about these things for many years, but NATO has turned a deaf ear to them, and has

been implacably moving towards the Russian borders.

Moscow should not feel any triumph about the Bucharest summit's previous decisions – to suspend the Membership Action Plan for Ukraine and Georgia. This is a trifle because in December this process will be resumed. But Scheffer's words about NATO's inevitable expansion are important, and NATO's decision to regard the missile defense system as its own brainchild rather than an American idea imposed on Europe is a serious symptom.

The Bucharest summit has shown that NATO and Europe or the West in general, have even more problems than it seems at first sight. Muslim Albania's NATO entry is part of the conflict between the West and the Muslim world, and its solution is nowhere in sight. The well-concealed contradictions about NATO's participation in missions in Afghanistan point to Alliance's military insolvency, and its ambiguous position of an accessory for the American war machine.

The Bucharest summit is the hardest of all. NATO is beset with problems – Paris and Berlin feel Iraq-related mistrust of Washington (despite the change of leaders in France and Germany), Polish-German and Greek-Macedonian relations remain complicated; NATO is reluctant to aggravate relations with President-Elect Dmitry Medvedev; and Ukraine and Georgia do not fit NATO's criteria in a whole number of parameters.

It is hard to be an American or European today. For several centuries, the Western civilization nurtured illusions about its eternal leadership and supremacy over all other cultures. But this era is coming to a close, and it is time for the West to adapt to a new reality.

But for the time being this adaptation is more in the nature of panic in front of the imminent invasion of a poorly reinforced fortress – “All those who can bear arms should come inside, and the bridge should be lifted. There is no point in reacting to the signals from the aliens, no matter what they suggest.” This is how NATO behaved with Russia under Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. No internal NATO problems matter when it comes to relations with Russia. NATO has never listened to Russia. Nor does it heed Russia's concerns now. This was the argument of those in Moscow who opposed Putin's visit to Bucharest, but the other view prevailed despite all skepticism.

This is why there was no “new Munich” in Bucharest – one was enough.

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