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Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty

Henry M. Robert

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On a link between security and prosperity

Dr. Daria SKODNIK: "NATO is ready to support your efforts to build up your defense structure so that you can address any external threats"



Mykola Siruk

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Last year Dr. Daria Daniels Skodnik became the first woman to be appointed as Dean of the Rome-based NATO Defense College. Founded on November 19, 1951, on the initiative of Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe, the college plays a leading role in education and teaching and guarantees that knowledge and critical reconsideration constantly increase NATO's cohesion and readiness for the future. Ms. Skodnik arrived in Kyiv last Monday to take part in the International NATO Week and deliver lectures to National Defense University of Ukraine cadets. She found a slot in her very busy schedule to grant an exclusive interview to The Day.

Why did you, as a woman, decide to choose a career in defense? It is usually considered to be a job for men.

"It was not so much a decision, as the result of my ambition to make a difference. I believe that security is a basis for the prosperity of the state. My first professional experience was in the security field in my home country, Slovenia. I learned a lot at that time. After that I worked as a Personnel and Legal Director, continuing in that position until shortly before the independence of Slovenia. I then started to work in the first training centre of the Slovene Armed Forces, before moving into the field of international military cooperation. Yes, it's an extraordinary job for a woman, but a highly rewarding one. It means being part of a military environment, but also contributing to international relations and diplomacy. Working with international organizations, and especially with NATO in the framework of the Partnership for Peace program, gave me the necessary preparation for my job today. As the Dean of the NATO Defense College, I supervise the academic side of the house, encompassing education, research and outreach. Here too, the focus is not only on military affairs, but also on the Comprehensive Approach and on the contribution of other institutions dealing with the civilian side of security-related issues."

What was your experience when your country gained independence? Did you participate in any protest actions?

"As a member of the Armed Forces, I was not allowed to protest. But I saw my role through my experience in the field of international military cooperation: I realized that dialog with other militaries can help prevent future wars. That, in a way, was the start of my drive to become active in this environment and to continue working in it today, with a more mature approach but still with the same basic rationale. The Courses for which I am responsible at the NATO Defense College can bring together more than fifty nations to discuss essential geopolitical and security-related issues. We offer a platform for dialog across cultures, ideologies and religions, going beyond misperceptions and prejudices.

"This is the unique value of this great institution, where I have the great privilege of heading the College's academic affairs."

Taking into account current events in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, some say that this was a godsend for NATO. What is your view on this?

"The raison d'être of NATO dates back to its inception, though it has changed and adapted to the fast-changing security environment. Let me express my personal view. I could agree that the latest events in Crimea and, as you know, what has happened has been strongly

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condemned by the Alliance and the international community will reinforce NATO's cohesion. I believe that, in the contemporary globalized world, all states are highly interdependent. Security is interrelated, and no nation can provide alone for its own security. So nations seek

population. NATO sees the value of its partners, and emphasis is given to the future prospects of partnerships.

"Since the Cold War, the same question has been asked again and again: is NATO still relevant? The latest events in Ukraine confirm that NATO will continue to play an essential role in the future as a deterrent force, as a provider of crisis management capabilities, or as a robust military Alliance. NATO will adapt its stance towards Russia and find a consensus to speak with one voice in response to Russia. This is likely to be the crucial part of the agenda for the upcoming NATO Summit in Wales."

Maybe it is time for NATO to rearm, as suggested in a recent article in the New Statesman?

"This is another important issue. The economic crisis and cuts in the defense budgets of the Allies are there for us all to see. I spoke about this at the recent Wilton Park Conference on 'NATO's post-2014 strategic narrative.' Maintaining defense expenditure at two percent of Member States' GDP is crucial if the Alliance is to remain capable of projecting its response to contemporary security challenges. The Smart Defense concept plays a significant role in this respect."

By the way, that article I mentioned quotes Lenin as having said "When a man sticks in a bayonet and strikes a push, he keeps pushing, but when he hits cold steel, he pulls back." When do you think is Putin going to strike steel?

"This is a highly political question, which I can't answer. But how such a breach of international law can happen in the 21st century is a highly contentious question, to be discussed by practitioners and academics alike."

Russia was NATO's strategic partner.

"Exactly. The NATO-Russia Council has been a very valuable platform for dialog since its inception. However, it is inconceivable that one sovereign state can invade the territory of another in this day and age. NATO sent a clear message to Russia that this is not acceptable, as did the United Nations and the EU. The North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO's principal decision-making body, has condemned Russia's actions as unacceptable by the standards of international law. In my speech at the Ukrainian National Defense University, I clearly stated that there can be no military solution to the problem. Negotiations and dialog will have to take place, so that a peaceful solution can be found."

On the subject of dialog, does this mean that the NDC will stop cooperating with the Russian Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces?

"At this point, all practical cooperation with Russian governmental institutions has been discontinued. We meet with the Academy once a year, and the exchange has always been very interesting and thought-provoking. But for the future, until the Alliance decides differently, the exchange will no longer take place."

At the 2004 Istanbul Summit, Ukraine applied for a MAP, and did so again in 2008. But Chancellor Merkel, whose country benefited from enlargement because it took NATO to Poland and other neighboring countries...

"But Ukraine changed its policy. Ukraine's declaration of non-alignment stopped the process, but not the cooperation between NATO and Ukraine. It remains a national decision as to whether the question of NATO membership is pursued or not. You may seek to find an answer in a referendum, as some new NATO members did in the past."

But a country does not need to have a referendum to get a MAP.

"You are right. Nevertheless, it remains a sovereign decision of Ukraine. Of course, this is only the beginning of the whole process of accession, which NATO is ready to support."

Today, we have a statement by the president of the Czech Republic, who said that if Russia enters Ukrainian territory, NATO should defend it. Do you think this is possible? Will there be consensus on this course of action?

"Although I represent the academic pillar of NATO, I shall try to answer this very important question. NATO is fundamentally an Article 5 Alliance, which means that any Member State of the Alliance invoking Article 5 will be defended by its Allies. Ukraine is a Partner, so Article 5 does not apply to Ukrainian territory. What NATO seeks is to support the reform of the defense and security sector, thus enabling the country to defend itself against external aggression. Education is an important part of the process, and that is why the NATO Defense College and the NATO School Oberammergau are here for the 14th International Week. NATO also continues to plan for common exercises and training."

What do you think about the European collective system of security? Is there such a thing? Some Ukrainian presidential candidates say that we will join the European collective security system. Can the European Security and Defense Policy develop in this direction?

"NATO is, first and foremost, a military organization. As no crisis can be resolved only by

