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Russia in European security architecture

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In 1994 a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed in which a bilateral cooperation, based on commonly shared values has been declared. Soon after 1999, when a CSDP was established a dialog on security became a necessity. Soon the relations between EU and Russia became highly institutionalized and in 2003 a concept of four “common spaces”, among them a “common space on external security” was introduced. This allowed a bilateral dialogue to be extended and cover a vast range of issues like crisis management and common peace keeping operations, cooperation in fight against terrorism, problems of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, military technology and others, and the relations were often referred to as a “strategic partnership”.

However, a development of a new political practice in both, internal policy (indicated, under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, by a departure from the democratization), as well as war in Chechnya forced the EU to use a more cautious language with respect to Russia and to be less optimistic regarding a prospect of a real partnership. Adopted at the end of 2004 European Security Strategy says only that “we should continue to work for closer relations with Russia, a major factor in our security and prosperity. Respect for common values will reinforce progress towards a strategic partnership”. The next Russian war – on Georgia – resulted in a much more straight language used by the European Parliament, who in a resolution on a CFSP adopted in February 2009 said quite clearly that as far as Russia is

concerned “no strategic partnership is possible if the values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law are not fully shared and respected” and in the next resolution on the negotiations between the EU and Russia on a new agreement we read, that the Russian conduct in a war with Georgia puts a “question mark over Russia’s readiness to build together with the EU a common space of security in Europe”.

It seems that Russians have no clear view how to treat the EU. Some of them are “sick and tired of dealing with Brussels bureaucrats. In Germany, Italy, France, we can achieve much more” (Konstantin Kosachev- Chairman of the Foreign Rel. Committee of Russian Duma). They realize, that the EU is not a fully-fledged partner for serious talks on hard security which Russia is so much interested. Moreover, how to deal with Russia on security (in particular on energy security) is, after Iraq, the most devising issue in the EU. Despite the frequent appeals and commitments to speak with Russia with one voice various countries tend to negotiate with Russia bilaterally whenever it is possible (esp. on lucrative business contracts) accepting the EU’s common action only when it is necessary. That gives Russia a tremendous capability to play one country against another or the EU as a whole.

On the other hand, Europe is seen as a very powerful partner because the share volume of the economy, high technology and finances as well as the impressive “soft power”, something, according to many, Russia is missing. That inspires many Russian politicians to develop an idea of very special Russia-Europe relationship. The main incentive to get closer and to enlist the EU to the group of very closed partners is the main Russian obsession that is the US. Minister Lavrov writes quite openly on US policy of containment as

“targeted not only against Russia but also against Europe as one of the contenders of the new world order” and comes up with an offer the EU should not refuse because “current problems of the European Union cannot be solved without constructive and forward looking relations with Russia that are based on mutual trust”. Some think of combining the potential of Russia and the EU to form “economically, militarily, geopolitically and culturally mightiest global center of power. This center will forever eliminate the threat of unipolarity.” (Alexei Arbatov). The attempt to form with Europe a counterbalance to the US was clearly seen, when Russia tried to set up a coalition of some European countries to block the American plans to intervene in Iraq and was reflected in the high appraisal of the conduct of President Sarkozy representing the EU in attempts to address the crisis during Russian-Georgian conflict in which Georgia was seen by Russia as a US proxy. In less confrontational approach to the US, the idea of a joint world condominium based on close cooperation between the US, Russia and the EU (with the hope, that it will be rather US and Russia+EU) is developed. This is why for some, like Minister Lavrov, Russians “do not want to see consolidation of the transatlantic link at our expense”.

Russian political thinking on the nature of international relations in the area of security and the place Russia should take on the world scene is determined by several factors. First is a deep disappointment with the West for what has happened after 1989-1991. In Russia, in a period of Gorbachev, there was a conviction, that the West will stick to George Kennan concept from the period of Cold War. It means, that Russia which is no longer openly confrontational and expansionist, which is more open and has more market oriented economy will be recognized as a legitimate partner with unquestioned territorial integrity and would be left to arrange their own internal matters without external interference or criticism. And then Russia will retain a status of an equal to the US partner on the world stage. Instead, Russia is treated

as a country which was defeated and was confronted with various political moves which not only were advanced without Russia's consent but openly against their opinion and interests.

The second factor is the way Russia is looking at the main organizing principle of international relations. For Russia, everything is a zero-sum game. Strengthening of others is Russia's loss. Despite the liberal concept of the international security based on transparency, interdependence and cooperation, Russia still adheres to the concept of spheres of influence and balance of power, combined with the penchant to the concept of the directoriat of great powers. Needless to say, for Russians to lose the status of a superpower on the par with the US only was something completely unacceptable.

The economic upturn resulting from the skyrocketing prices of gas and oil and the outcome of war with Georgia which in Russia was seen as the beginning of a great political come back, resulted in an attempt to push towards a remodelling of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. This is not the first time Russia takes such an initiative. At the end of XIXth century, realizing that approaching armament race would be fatal for the very survival of tsarist regime, Russia came up with an idea of world disarmament conference which should freeze the weapons holding and establish arbitration as the main mechanism of settling the international disputes. In early 70-ties Soviet Union came up with the idea of a European Conference on Security and Cooperation which was to substitute the post-war peace treaty and freeze a status quo in Europe, legitimizing Soviet post war political and territorial gains.

The idea of the President Medvedev plan is somehow similar. The proposed treaty should confirm the principle of not using force to settle inter-state disputes and strict adherence to the territorial integrity of all states (it means – no attempts to solve a problem of frozen conflicts by military means and no interference in the problems in the Northern Caucasus including Chechnya). The idea of equal security is enhanced by demand that no country should be allowed to increase its security at the detriment to the security of the others, although it is highly unclear who would decide is a particular measure taken by one state detrimental to the security of another one. The freedom of joining military treaties clearly stipulated in Helsinki Treaty as well as in other major international agreements like Paris Charter of a New Europe or Charter for European Security is ominously omitted. On the contrary, the expansion of military alliances (read – NATO) is declared as an example of a threatening measure.

So, what should be the reaction on this proposal?

1. Russia is clearly a critical factor in Euro-Atlantic security and should be treated with caution but also with respect.
2. There is a whole range of institutions dealing with security in this region: OSCE, NATO-Russia Council, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council to name just some of them. There is no need to create still another one, what would be quite appropriate is to make a review of the existing institutions and, perhaps, dynamize them and give them some more muscles.

3. The principle of indivisibility of the security of European countries and the security of the US, so fundamental during the Cold War is still valid. Therefore, every security initiative should be first discussed bilaterally in the NATO-EU framework. Then the common position should be presented at OSCE, which should be the main forum for the discussion. Speaking with Russia with one voice is absolutely essential.
4. The idea clearly, although not openly presented in President Medvedev's plan that Russia should have a veto power in any security related decision of NATO or EU should be rejected. In particular, Russia can not treat NATO as a threat, as it is stipulated in Russian Military Doctrine, because it is incompatible with various important documents including a US-Russia Strategic Framework Declaration signed in 2008, where one reads that "the era in which the US and Russia considered one another an enemy or strategic threat has ended". Therefore, NATO enlargement cannot be treated as undermining Russian security. It is not a zero-sum game.
5. Russia as a very important political factor should be consulted on every security issue, and this consultations should be not a formality but of substance. NATO-Russia consultations during the period of drafting a new NATO Strategic Concept is a good example. One could deplore the lack of similar approach on the Russian side before the adaptation of Russian Military Doctrine.
6. Discussing the President Medvedev plan one can not forget other countries and set up a system of consultations esp. with Ukraine, eg in the framework of EU-Ukraine dialogue or NATO-Ukraine Commission
7. The best form of completing the debates would be an OSCE declaration, similar to one adopted in Istanbul in 1999. The nature of this document (a political declaration, not a legally binding treaty) would allow not only the EU, but also organizations not having an international legal status (like CSTO, CIS or NATO) to sign it as it was postulated by President Medvedev.

Needless to say, entities like Abchazia, Northern Cyprus, or South Ossetia would not qualify for signing.

Russia is definitely in need of more formal recognition as a great power, which has some legitimate interests. NATO and EU have many common security interests (and other interests as well!) with Russia. The recent war with Georgia casts a shadow of mistrust on the sincerity of Russian commitments to the norms of international behaviour. Russia in its rhetoric tends to return to the old practisies of ignoring disturbing facts. Nevertheless, neither the EU nor US can carry on “business as usual” but an attempt to engage Russia in a serious dialogue on future of our region is a necessity.

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