

The project of a European Security Treaty in contemporary Russian foreign policy

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The replacement of Boris Yeltsin by Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin on the last day of 1999 marked the start of a new stage in the development of Russia's foreign and security policy. At first (2000-2003), it was characterized by attempts to build a partnership with Washington and Nato countries in the frameworks of the War on terror. Kremlin voluntarily joined the anti-terrorist coalition and played a significant role in Nato's war in Afghanistan. Initial plans of both Russia and Nato were oriented on developing a long-term strategic partnership with the aim of providing security and stability in Eurasia.

For a number of political and even ideological reasons these plans have never become reality. Somewhere in the fall of 2003 the second post-Soviet generation of Russian leadership recognized that fact as an uncomfortable reality, which gave way to a gradual build-up of contradictions between Russia and the United States/Nato on a number of issues concerning the Russia-West relationship: property rights, law enforcement, democracy promotion, democratic elections, media independence, etc. During this period (2000-2008) a special feature of Russia's foreign policy was its increased assertiveness towards the neighboring Cis countries, as well as some harsh rhetoric against Nato and Eu interventionist policy in Eurasia. President Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference on February 12, 2007, marked a shift between the hidden and open stages of a growing conflict between Moscow and the West.

Military conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia in August 2008, which lasted only five days, significantly transformed the basic foundations of Russian foreign policy towards the Commonwealth of Independent States and the European Union/Nato. Before the Five-Day War, where Russia took the side of South Ossetia and sent its troops to protect civilian population and peace-keepers, Moscow considered Europe as the key long-term strategic partner in the international arena. But the support of President Saakashvili of Georgia by the Usa, Uk, the three Baltic States, Poland and even the 'orange' Ukraine of Viktor Yushchenko led to a major reconsideration in Moscow of the role played by Nato and Eu in providing security for the whole Eurasia, which includes Cis as its integral part.

From a Russian perspective, these changes were the following:

1) Nato, led by the Usa and some of the pro-Us governments of Eastern Europe, is the key strategic threat to Russian national security.

2) Nato/Usa are not able to provide security for Eurasia outside of the Article 5 zone; that is why there is an urgent need to developing and sign a new European Security Treaty. The treaty could be based on a special Nato-Csto agreement; alternatively all Eurasian countries may sign it without using an umbrella of intergovernmental organizations. Moscow's key message was: the Nato-centered system of European security should be replaced as soon as possible by a wider and more flexible system, which reflects contemporary realities of world politics in the XXI century.

3) Cis, China and Turkey are nowadays political and economic partners at least as important for Moscow as the European Union and Nato were previously.

Contemporary Russian foreign policy and the project of a European Security Treaty (Est)

On June 5, 2008 in Berlin, during an official ceremony attended by German political, parliamentary and civic leaders at the *Bundestag*, and later the same year (in November 2008) in Evian, France, at the first International Conference on World Politics, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced a new Russian initiative of a new international treaty devoted to all aspects of post-Cold War European security, namely «[...] drafting and signing a legally binding treaty on European security in which the organizations currently working in the Euro-Atlantic area could become parties»¹.

The initial idea of the Russian President was to transform the existing system of security agreements and institutions in Europe and the Euro-Atlantic zone. He proposed the signing of another continent-wide agreement, which should replace the out-of-date Helsinki Final Act of August 1, 1975 and become a sort of 'Helsinki-II'.

The idea was expressed in the following terms:

«Our predecessors during the Cold War years managed to draw up the Helsinki Final Act (which, as the legal foundation for the European system, has withstood the test of time despite all the difficulties encountered), and so why should we not be able to take the next step today? Namely, drafting and signing a legally binding treaty on European security in which multiple organizations, currently working in the Euro-Atlantic area, could become parties».

The explanation of the Russian President clarified that he was talking about a regional pact, based upon the Un Charter, dealing with one of the last unsolved issues of European politics: to what extent we may rely upon use of force while

¹ www.kremlin.ru, Documents, June 5, 2008. Accessed on January 15, 2010.

trying to deal with the threats and challenges of European and Transatlantic politics. According to Dmitry Medvedev:

«We could look at a regional pact based, naturally, on the principles of the Un Charter and clearly defining the role of force as a factor in relations within the Euro-Atlantic community. This pact could achieve a comprehensive resolution of the security indivisibility and arms control issues in Europe that are of such concern to us all»².

So, the notion of indivisibility of European security, including the cooperation between all security institutions at the continent is at the center of Russia's proposal.

Russia's initiative was considered by politicians and media from the very first moment as a typical example of Moscow's *'divide et impera'* policy towards unified democratic Europe. On the other hand, it is rather obvious to political *élites* in Europe that today neither Osce nor Nato can fully guarantee the continent from the emergence of another crisis of the same type as the Kosovo conflict of 1999 and the Georgia-Ossetia War of August 2008.

After the election of Dmitry Medvedev as the third President of the Russian Federation in early March 2008, he immediately began searching for a new strategy of Russian foreign policy, which would retain some of the achievements of previous periods (memberships in G-8, the Council of Europe, international financial institutions, as well as stability of relations with Usa and Nato), but would also be more cooperative with leading Western countries and institutions³. Such a policy should create a favorable external climate for the modernization of Russia's political system and its national economy.

The attempts by the Kremlin and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote a new European Security Treaty may be divided into two stages.

The first stage (June 2008-December 2009) was characterized by Russia's intention to sign a multilateral and binding agreement, which would regulate all spheres of military and soft security in the Cis, Central/Eastern Europe and Transatlantic zones. We don't know whether Russia's politicians and diplomats involved in the promotion of the initiative, in Europe and beyond, had at that time a concrete text in mind. Russian diplomats know very well that it could take many years of negotiations for all involved countries to agree on a final version of it.

The publication of a draft for the European Security Treaty (November 29, 2009) and the long-expected visit to Russia of the new Secretary General of Nato Anders Rasmussen (December 15-17, 2009) marked a threshold between two stages of Russia's attitude towards its pan-European security initiative. Rasmussen's visit was marked by a very clear and straightforward message: Nato would not support Russia's initiative on a new continent-wide Treaty. His advice was the traditional one: let's ask the Osce to continue discussions on the

² *Ibidem*.

³ Marcel de Haas, *Medvedev's security policy: a provisional assessment*, «Russian Analytical Digest», June 18, 2009, No. 62, pp. 2-5.

matter. Since December 2009 Russia has therefore considered the promotion of the European Security Treaty as a difficult challenge for its emerging public diplomacy, which may however one day return on the agenda of European politics.

In order to promote President Medvedev's initiative, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has used all possible existing instruments of public diplomacy, including publications, invitations of foreign journalists to Russia, its embassies world-wide and the organization of security-related academic conferences, with the involvement of Russian politicians, journalists, academics and even military officers.

The Five-Day War in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (August 8-12, 2008) has undermined the trust of the international community in Russia's attempts to fix interstate borders in Europe and limit the use of military force. It is important however to stress that Russia's Est proposal, that preceded it in June 2008, was not related to any specific international event, not even to the recognition of Kosovo by the Usa and its close allies. The project of Est demonstrates instead the long-term aspiration of Moscow to downgrade the role of military forces in Europe and reject any prospects for changes in the interstate borders on the continent.

The second stage, which started right after the draft of the Est was published on the Kremlin's web-site, demonstrated also Moscow's attempt to 'save face' by transforming an initially binding international legal document into a sort of declaration on modernized principles of international law. As our analysis demonstrates, it would be practically impossible to apply the norms of such a 'declaration' to the actual threats in the region. At the same time, it could be quite comfortable for Russian public diplomacy to continue in its attempts to portray the Usa as a non-European country which plays a destructive role in European security policies. Also, if the initial Russian agreement were too loose, too complicated and almost impossible to negotiate, Moscow's current initiative could be agreed to rather easily. But it is impossible to find any rationale for the Usa and Nato member-States to do that.

Why is that so? The answer lies in the correspondent long-standing Us strategy towards Europe. For Washington, Russia still is the most visible challenge to European security. Since Europe until now is an extremely important ally for the Usa, current Us policy towards Russia can be described as an updated version of the containment policy reminiscent of the Cold War period. The key element of this policy being the continuation of a state of tension between Russia and some European members of Nato. The idea of 'resetting' Us-Russia relations, introduced by Joe Biden and Barack Obama in the early days of the current Us Administration, has changed a few non-strategic aspects of the relations between the Usa and the Russian Federation. In the security area, 'reset' is close to failure since Washington is still trying to keep Russia out of Europe and challenging

Russia's security/political/economic interests towards Cis members. The failure of the negotiations on Start II (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), as well as the refusal to establish contacts between Nato and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, together with the outstanding problems for Russia to get into the Wto, all these developments are sending the Kremlin a rather clear message: the Usa would like to continue keep Russia out of Europe, as it has effectively been doing since the end of the Second World War.

We would like to avoid a straight-forward economic determinism, but it is rather clear that at the current stage of development of the Russian socio-economic system, the government should concentrate its limited resources on modernizing the country. That's why an agreement on security matters with its European neighbours would increase its attractiveness to investment. A formal and effective partnership with European neighbours would help the Russian Government to concentrate its limited resources on the development of infrastructures, R&D, education, etc.. The personal involvement of Dmitry Medvedev in the attempts to develop the Skolkovo Innovation Center near Moscow into a nation-wide center of excellence, which could be duplicated in other regions, demonstrates the great importance of the issue as well as the great expectations connected to it. Skolkovo may become the symbol of a growing cooperation in high-tech areas between Moscow and its Western neighbours. It will be a major attempt to reestablish mutual trust, negatively affected both by the unilateralism of George W. Bush's Administration and the Five-Day War in South Ossetia and Georgia.

Nato's eastward enlargement has been recently labeled by the Kremlin as a major strategic threat to Russian Federation, in a mid-term perspective⁴. The Nato enlargement to Central/Eastern Europe and the Balkans has gone through three stages (1999, 2004 and 2009) and transformed the Alliance into the dominant actor in the European security system comprising 28 members. At the same time, it is well-known both in Washington and Moscow nowadays that the key challenges to the security of Nato member-States are located very far away from the «Nato area», mentioned in Article 5 of the Atlantic Treaty of April 1949. The countries, threatening the stability of the Middle East and Far Eastern Asia are Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Korea. Furthermore there are many evidences that since its first enlargement in March 1999 to the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, Nato's effectiveness has declined even if the hard security of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has obviously increased to an unprecedented level.

In the current period of growing Us self-sufficiency and global economic turmoil Nato is unable to preserve its status as the key security organization in Eurasia, as it still reflects the realities of the Cold War era and it mainly protects the Us interests in Europe. Due to the collapse of the Ussr and the tremendous

⁴ *The Military Doctrine of Russian Federation*, text released on February 8, 2010: http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461.

popularity of the Usa as well as of the European social model of welfare State, the domination of Nato countries in the Osce is beyond compare. That is why, from Moscow's perspective, the Osce nowadays is not able to become the proper forum for discussions on post-Cold War European security⁵. Its institutional memory is such that it may guarantee only endless conflicts between Russia and new Europe countries, with or even without direct Us support of its Eastern European allies. The key message of the Kremlin to the over 50 European countries of the Osce is today the following: «We do need direct dialogue between European countries without Us hegemonic involvement, if at all possible; or with a more moderate Us role in the European security system than what we had after 1990».

Prospects for Russia's membership in Nato

The development of post-Soviet Russia's security strategy was not a linear process. There were many ups and downs, and some of them cannot be explained by a lack of political will, even if in many cases it was the only apparent explanation. Such an inconsistency can be explained by three factors.

First of all, Russia is undergoing a period of transition that is very difficult and painful, while currently still in the very initial stages of the long road to a free market economy and democracy. Its foreign policy is a logical consequence of this complicated transformation of its internal structures and of the entire way of life of this vast country.

Secondly, the fluctuations in Russian foreign policy are related not only to the fact that Russia's *élites* are fragmented in groupings with different economic interests, political and ideological orientations, but also to the fact that the ruling group is convinced that Russia's advantage is in her ability to keep her hands free, maneuvering between the great nations and their blocks. Modern Russia inherited from the Soviet Union a special place in the global politico-economic system, and the leaders of the country are not willing to give up that inheritance.

Thirdly, a significant impact on Russia is exerted by the ambiguity of other centers of power in contemporary international relations, namely the United States of America, the European Union, and the People's Republic of China. At times, the West exhibited a lack of attention to Russia, ignoring her views on some major international issues. Under such circumstances, Russia tries to respond to the challenges of her own safety on an *ad hoc* basis, especially when convinced that her legitimate interests are being disregarded by other States⁶.

An important indicator of Russia's readiness to introduce a qualitative change in the foreign policy will be her course of action toward the leading

⁵ Henning Schroder, *Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020*, «Russian Analytical Digest», June 18, 2009, No. 62, pp. 6-10.

⁶ Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channel One, August 31, 2008, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82912_type82916_206003.shtml (accessed January 19, 2009).

international organizations. In the nearest future Russia will be unlikely to vote for radical changes to the existing system of global intergovernmental organizations. Most domestic politicians and experts believe that Russia has more to lose than to gain from such changes. First of all, the Un is still regarded by Russian political and military leadership as the only genuine global organization, the axial structure of the entire system of international relations and international law. Officially Russia supports the Un reform, but in practice it seeks to delay the process as any change in the composition and authority of Un agencies, including the Security Council, would reduce Russia's role in international affairs.

On the other hand, Russia will promote the role of the G-20 where she feels more at ease than in other similar clubs for sovereign States devoid of the rigid rules of intergovernmental organizations and enforceable decisions. From Moscow's perspective, the G-20 has now become the most representative forum where the leading nations of the world discuss critical and pressing issues. That is what motivates Russia to actively participate in its work and to advance her own initiatives or support the ideas, broached by others, that match the current stage of reforming the national politico-economic system⁷. Kremlin's interest in the G-8, from our point of view, will be decreasing in the coming years. This will happen primarily due to a significant difference between the status of the seven older members of the Group and Russia itself. All member-countries of the former G-7 were parties to the leading Western security institutions, first of all Oecd and Nato. They all enjoy a higher standard of living, a well-functioning system of democratic institutions, and their economies do not depend as heavily as Russia on the fluctuations in commodity prices.

The activity of Russia in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is likely to remain at rather high levels. Before the current crisis, especially in 2007-2008, Russia was considering the possibility of positioning the Sco as an alternative to Nato in matters of Eurasia, but in 2009 a different point of view became predominant in the Kremlin: to promote cooperation and equal partnership between Nato and the Sco, considering Russia's fear of the leadership of China in the Sco. Despite the disparity in military capabilities of the two defensive alliances (Nato and the Sco), one could envision a gradual development of relations between them, above all, political dialogue and cooperation in the field of logistics for Nato operations in Afghanistan. Growing budget defense spending in China and Russia make a gap in military capabilities of Nato member States and Russia/China less impressive.

The idea of Russia's full membership in Nato has been discussed by its political *élites* at least twice: first, in early 1990s during initial period of post-Soviet history; and second, right after terrorist attacks on September 11 in the

⁷ Liuto Kari, Marika Heikkilä, Eini Laaksonen, *Political risk for foreign firms in the Western Cis. An analysis on Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine*, Pei Electronic Publications 18/2009, www.tse.fi/pei, p. 2.

Usa, when Russia has joined the Us-led antiterrorist coalition. Both times the idea failed due to numerous domestic and external factors. In sum: neither Russian leaders were ready to subordinate national security interests to those of Nato, nor the Alliance's members were concerned in integrating a huge, economically unstable and politically undemocratic country into the well-functioning mechanism of the organization. That's why when recently a group of German very respected and influential politicians brought up again the idea of Russia's membership in Nato, the immediate reaction of the Russian foreign policy community was modest.

It is rather obvious that the only road for Russia's integration into the Nato structure should be based on acceptance by the Kremlin of the basic common values shared by all Nato countries, while also sharing Nato's willingness to develop an effective and transparent structure of global security architecture.

Nato-Russia partnership in developing a global security system could therefore be a part of the Us-Russia 'reset' policy that President Barack Obama proposed in February 2009. But this policy was so far not successful, the key reason being the persistent lack of trust about the respective real intentions of Us and Russian leaders. Foreign policy of previous Us Administration towards the former Soviet Republics, especially the 'regime change' experiments in Georgia and Ukraine, proved to be disastrous both for these two nations and for Us-Russia relations. The Russian Federation is waiting for a clear message that Barack Obama's Administration is willing to develop a more cooperative strategy towards the countries of the region and stay away from 'regime change' experiments. In the early spring of 2010, the Institute of Modern Development in Moscow, whose Chairman of the Board of Trustees is President Medvedev, had proposed future membership in Nato as an element of a foreign policy scenario which may coincide with the modernization strategy of the Russian Federation.

And here is the key. There is no immediate military threat to Russian Western borders from Nato. The Kremlin considers its relationship with Us-led security institutions as an element for modernization of the country. Moscow is searching for 'a club', whose members share the same vision of an optimal socio-economic and political model of XXI century as a century of prosperity and peace.

Conclusion

In the coming years Russia will preserve the main traits of its current foreign policy: the desire to maintain the *status quo*, both globally (multipolarity) and bilaterally with Washington in a limited number of areas (nuclear weapons, Abm issues and post-Soviet countries).

Nato and the Russian Federation still disagree on many issues of European security. For example, Western countries prefer to speak about 'comprehensive security', and that includes all possible challenges to international security, that Nato countries have to face and solve 'in concert'. Moscow prefers instead to

speak about an 'architecture of international security', to be interpreted as an invitation to all inter-governmental organizations in Europe, not just Nato, to get involved in security dialogue and decision-making.

Why is the initiative of Dmitry Medvedev on the European Security Treaty so unpopular and unwanted in Europe? There are several reasons:

1) The Usa and the new European members of Nato are satisfied with the existing system of European security. For Washington, the transaction costs of Moscow's integration into the existing European security arrangements are much higher than keeping the *status quo*. What emerged about 65 years ago is still rather relevant to the priorities of Us foreign policy in Europe: keep the Usa in and Russia out. The current architecture of European security includes a powerful Nato in Europe, a weak Csto out of Europe, and Us military-political domination in the continent, in order to guarantee the existing *status quo*.

2) For it to be successful, the idea of a European Security Treaty should have been proposed not by Russia, but by an influential Western European country (Germany or France), or alternatively, in the best scenario, by a *troika* of Germany, France and Russia. But since Angela Merkel has replaced Gerhard Schroder as *Bundeskanzlerin* in 2005, the idea of a special format of cooperation between the three largest continental European countries, initiated by Boris Yeltsin in late 1990s, is completely out of the agenda. It is almost impossible to imagine that President Medvedev's idea could be seriously considered by European leaders without the active support of the old Europe.

That's why the discussions on a new strategic concept of Nato are so important for the future of Nato-Russia relations. The motto of 1990s that «Nato should go out of area or out of business» is not relevant anymore, at least from Moscow's perspective. For the out of area operations, we should develop Un-related mechanisms and the cooperation between regional security organizations, including Nato, Csto, and may be even the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Us unipolarity is not anymore relevant to current state of global politics and it has no future. Engagement of Russia into a cooperation with Nato could be based on recognition of this simple truth.

Internationally, Russia's primary mission, something that the current leadership pays great attention to, is to uphold the existing system of international law with a strong emphasis on respecting sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. At the same time, Russia will endeavor to give impetus to the integration processes in the Cis. Its main objective is to achieve the *status* of the leader in the post-Soviet space and to obtain internationally a mandate to represent the interests of the States within this space. The resources of Russia's diplomacy will largely depend on the shape of its national economy. The implementation of the aforementioned two goals (maintaining the *status quo* and leadership in the post-Soviet space) will however remain a Russian priority regardless of the state of its economy.

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