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Choosing Cooperation over Conflict: Russia and the Euro-Atlantic Security Order

Margarete Klein and Solveig Richter

With Putin once again taking the reins as Russia's president, it can be expected that the country will become a difficult partner for the West over the coming years. For if one reads the articles and statements by Putin during the electoral campaign, it can be surmised that he will shape his foreign policy around anti-Western rhetoric and great power blustering. It is necessary, however, that there be continued efforts with Russia under Putin 3.0 in order to dampen the systemic conflict over political order. As long as it remains an unresolved issue as to how the Euro-Atlantic security order incorporating Russia should be shaped, it will not be possible to fully realize the amount of security policy cooperation with Moscow necessary to address current local and global security challenges. The Georgian War of 2008 emphatically demonstrated that the fragile relationship can worsen and take on crisis proportions as long as a stable system for cooperative security does not exist with Russia.

NATO and the EU need Russia's cooperation, for example in regulating ethnic conflicts such as those in Kosovo or in Transnistria, on issues of energy security, in stabilising Afghanistan, and for arms control and nuclear non-proliferation. Cooperation with Russia is critical, precisely since it has a tremendous spoiler potential due to its veto right as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Without Moscow, it will be difficult to build up sufficient deterrence *vis-à-vis* Iran, to weaken the Syrian regime, or to resolve the international disagreement over Kosovo's independence.

“Reset” of Relations with Russia: No Major Results

Following the low point marked by the Georgian War, there were definite hopes over the past years of an improvement in relations between Russia and the West, not least because US President Barack Obama initiated a “reset” in relations with Russia at the outset of his presidency. Aside from the agreement on the new START disarmament treaty and intensified cooperation in Afghanistan, this reset has not heralded any major results.

There are, however, a series of suggestions on how Russia could be better integrated into the Euro-Atlantic security order.

In June 2008, for example, Russia's outgoing president Dmitry Medvedev recommended a legally binding international treaty from "Vancouver to Vladivostok". According to this treaty, none of the signatories could embark on actions that would "significantly" affect the security of any of the other treaty partners. The majority of the western states turned down the Russian suggestion; the one-sided security benefits for Moscow would have been too obvious, as it would have enabled blockage of virtually every NATO action due to the vague formulation – whether this happened to be a new round of enlargement or the establishment of the planned missile defence system. In addition to the Russian suggestion, the vision of Russian membership within NATO is conjured up again and again. There is, however, a lack of political will on both sides. Apart from that, Russia does not fulfil the criteria at this point in time. This does not mean, however, that any efforts towards intensifying security policy cooperation are predestined to failure. In order to establish a stable system for cooperative security with Russia, three steps are needed.

Step 1: Reduce Mistrust, Build Confidence

The first step is to reduce the mistrust that exists on both sides. There continue to be forces within NATO as well as Russia that perceive the other side as a threat. Even though a military conflict has become unlikely since the end of the Cold War, a security dilemma persists between the two sides.

Over the short to medium-term, it is therefore extremely important to achieve and expand military restraint and transparency within the area of "hard security". The focus here is on the conventional arms control regime (CFE), which has been at an impasse since 1999 and is faced with an outright breakdown. If it cannot be revived, there must at least be an effort to strengthen the Vienna Document and

to agree on reciprocal measures of military restraint within the common border region between NATO and Russia. All of these steps should actually supplement the CFE regime; as a substitute they can only partially restore the loss of confidence. In its traditional function as the champion of arms control, Germany plays a key role in drafting compromises and insisting on the importance of contractual regulations *vis-à-vis* sceptics, particularly in the USA.

If the perpetuation of existing treaties is of primary importance, then the expansion of arms controls and nuclear disarmament are next in line. Attention is needed in particular in the currently unregulated area of sub-strategic nuclear weapons. This will only be possible if there is no further erosion of conventional arms control, for Russia sees a close connection between conventional inferiority and nuclear deterrence. Overall, a set of detailed treaties with clearly defined verification mechanisms has greater chances of building confidence over the short to medium term than a comprehensive security treaty "from Vancouver to Vladivostok" or between Russia and NATO – both of which have been suggested by Russia.

Step 2: Expand Institutionalised Cooperation

The second building block on the path towards a cooperative security system with Russia is constituted by a strengthening of the established pillars of institutionalised cooperation. The existing organisations continue to lack either effectiveness or inclusiveness. Thus while the OSCE includes all the states from Vancouver to Vladivostok – including Russia – it has proved incapable of mastering the security challenges such as the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans or the Caucasus. Therefore the first focus should be on expressly supporting the OSCE in its domains of conflict regulation and crisis management. The challenge is to preserve the OSCE as an institution for open debate on all issues of Euro-Atlantic

security order, while at the same time avoiding this becoming a place for just paying lip service to one another.

NATO, an exclusive institution, has grown up opposite the OSCE as the most effective player within the Euro-Atlantic region. This adds all the more importance to establishing a strategic partnership between NATO and Russia – as agreed at the summit in Lisbon in November 2010. There is a need not only for confidence-building measures, but also more practical cooperation. Above all, issues of strategic importance must be approached cooperatively. Missile defence constitutes a major opportunity, but also entails the risk of increased mistrust in the case of failure. Therefore it is up to the NATO summit in Chicago in May 2012 for agreement to be formed regarding the first concrete steps towards cooperation and transparency. In addition to practical cooperation, the mechanisms of internal conflict regulation within the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) should be improved. The participating parties could, for example, agree relatively quickly on a consultation obligation. If trust and reliability in fulfilling expectations were to increase, over the medium-term there could be agreement on a shared responsibility for the NRC on these issues, which can hardly be regulated without one another. This scenario, however, has grown unlikely in light of Putin's anti-Western rhetoric.

Despite all the current difficulties facing the relationship between Moscow and the EU, there continues to be potential for developing security policy both in terms of the institutional foundations as well as in cooperation on specific topics like ethno-territorial conflicts. The joint recommendation from Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russia's still-serving President Medvedev to establish an EU-Russia Security Committee at foreign minister level touches on a real need, particularly in the EU-Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) cooperation between Moscow and Brussels. Ultimately, the EU has only been able to incorporate Russia into its missions on an *ad hoc* basis,

for example in Chad. Both sides could benefit from systematic cooperation on external military crisis management. The EU can and should also play an important role on soft security issues like energy security and human dimensions.

Step 3: Strengthen Common Set of Values

Third, the objective of the NATO and EU states must continue to be an integration of Russia into the Western community of values. While different political systems do not stand in the way of pragmatic security cooperation, such cooperation only gains reliability when both sides share norms like democracy, rule of law and human rights.

The negotiations between the EU and Russia would be the adequate platform for making rapid progress in specific areas. As Russia's most important modernisation partner, the EU has greater opportunities for exerting influence and can provide better incentives than the USA, NATO or the OSCE. The Union is faced with a dilemma though: if it focuses too much on pragmatic steps in terms of economic or security policy in its cooperation with Russia, it risks playing into the hands of the authoritarian regime. If it ascribes normative issues too great of importance, however, it could block potential progress in other areas. But the mass protests in December 2011 and March 2012 in Russia as a result of manipulated elections show that there is a greater demand for political reforms within the society than has frequently been assumed. This opens up a window of opportunity for increasing democratisation within Russia, which should be supported from the EU side.

Need for European Leadership

These steps require a considerable degree of political will and leadership. Russian-American relations, which initially became more dynamic in 2009 with the "Reset", have stagnated. In light of the coming

electoral campaign, President Obama will avoid any steps that could be criticised as giving Moscow too many concessions. This is all the more the case since Putin regained the presidency. For his part, he has thus far given scant signals of making concessions on contentious issues like dealing with the countries in the post-Soviet region. Neither Moscow nor Washington can therefore be counted on as initiators of a reshaping process for the Euro-Atlantic security order. More than ever, there is a need for European initiative and leadership. Above all, Germany and Poland – the dynamos of Europe's Eastern Policy – must carefully coordinate among themselves; France must also be included. Only if a greater degree of consensus can be formed around Europe's Russia policy and if substantial recommendations can be formulated, will the Europeans be able to make full use of their decisive advantages: their "soft power" as a community of values and their economic incentives.

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