

EU-Russia Relations from a Russian Point of View

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The turbulent developments after the outbreak of the crisis in and over Ukraine, the accession of Crimea and the lingering Syrian crisis, have completely changed the outlook of the world and of European politics. The entire structure and configuration of the European polity established by Yalta, Helsinki and the Basic EU-Russia Act agreements are nowadays put into question. The well-known tenets of the post-post-Cold War era and hopes for a New World Order seem to be reversed, and certain observers even started speculating about the advent of a new Cold War, a 'hybrid Cold War' or Cold War 2.0. We now live in a new world which is still to be defined in the terms of a novel political science (that needs innovative methods similar to the situation when quantum mechanics was introduced to physics in the 1920s) and needs to be thoroughly analysed. Contrary to many euphoric expectations, Russia has not entered 'the democratic Western family of nations' and largely remains 'a continent apart' and – in the eyes of many Western critics – a clone of the late Soviet Union, only without the Communist ideology.

Never since the beginning of the 1960s were the relations between Russia and its Western partners – with information wars raging and the sanctions war continuing – so strained. Russian political science pundits have concluded that the West once again has chosen the strategy of containment regarding Russia, which is still (again) described as a foe and major security threat – almost on par with the notorious ISIS. All this has exacerbated old Moscow grievances as was first succinctly formulated by President Putin in his famous Munich speech of 2007 and his statement at the UNGA sessions to the point that the West uses a double-standards' approach and does not regard Russia as an equal, respected and reliable partner.

On the other hand, many voices in the West demand the delineation of a new policy to offset Moscow's 'new intransigence' because, as they see it, Putin's Russia rejects the existing international system's norms and thwarts post-WWII rules that have guided the European order, meaning that Russia's policy is lacking any legitimacy. They allege that the 'Russian annexation of Crimea and open support of separatist forces in the troubled eastern regions of Ukraine' have shown that the Kremlin has decided to act independently – disregarding the Western critics. In and by Russia this is seen as the sustainment of Russia's vital geopolitical interests and some kind of 'revenge for the alleged humiliation and inattention' it suffered from the Western side in the 1990s.

Moscow – despite its apparent though arguable economic feebleness – has reached global prominence, enjoys almost undisputed influence and its 'foreign policy capitalisation' or the presence at international 'radars' has overreached, in certain aspects, even the Soviet global clout at its highest point. This once again makes Russia almost ready to compete with the USA. Not considering the EU a serious interlocutor, it pretends to become the leader of those parts of the world where the elites and masses are tired of the 'eternal American diktat'.

The pitch of controversial adversarial rhetoric on both sides seems to put into oblivion not only the outlines of a 'common security space' and the entire heritage of Russia-West relations in modern times but buries all hopes for the further promotion of arms control or a constructive build-up of deeper confidence and a relationship of trust between Russia and the West. The vision of a Common community space 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' or a world free from nuclear weapons, or further –and deeper – cuts in nuclear arsenals appears irrelevant in the current situation. Are those processes, therefore, an impasse – at least for the time being? I am rather optimistic in this regard.

Moscow's observers tend to state that Russia's aspiration to become a 'strategic ally' of the West (though many in NATO habitually prefer not to regard Moscow as such!) was arguably ignored in the 1990s. Their Western colleagues retort that Russia has never made any moves towards actual democratic changes and sound market reforms which would have helped to integrate it into a community of free European nations. Moscow eluded actual 'de-Sovietisation', which would have included a thorough lustration process for the high-placed USSR Communist party officials and KGB officers, the *Berufsverbots* for the apparatchiks of the *Ancien regime* – as implemented in most of the other ex-Warsaw Pact states (which has, though not without difficulties or *Angst* of the *ex-apparatchiks*, ultimately turned the Communist-ruled

former GDR into an integral part of the unified Germany). The current bland of socially-oriented modern capitalism has never worked in post-Soviet Russia.

Ideologically, the new Russian 'elites' never shared the fundamental traditional Western values. This all led to confrontation on issues ranging from basics of democratic rule and principles of governance, separation of powers, human rights and freedoms to the approach toward the resolution of almost all major international crises. The diametrically opposite attitudes of the Western and Russian elites have been, for example, lately demonstrated by Moscow's stance on the 'Charlie Hebdo' affair or certain Western officials' reaction to the Russian activity in Ukraine or Syria.

No doubt, all these malign developments have particularly affected the relations with Russia's traditional European partners, specifically with the European Union.

Since the demise of the Communist state Russia is painstakingly trying to define its national identity rocking between the acknowledgment that it is historically an integral part of Europe, a European nation, though a specific one, and certain pipe dreams about the creation of a 'Eurasian' entity or even claims to be a separate 'Continent-Russia', something like an island in the geopolitical Eurasian heartland. Many contemporary politicians and commentators in Moscow tend to ignore the fact that due to the influx of European technological prowess in the eighth century Russia has become a powerful empire with considerable military might and diplomatic clout only as a result of swift Westernisation under Peter the Great without whom it would have evolved into a semi-colony like the ancient China. It is thus that it has become a major player in the European affairs.

Ever since the 14th century, European written sources contained statements mentioning the dream for a united Europe. This continent was marked not only as the cradle of modern global civilisation, science and the world's technological workshop but also as the arena of bloody wars and revolts. The 19th century launched the slogan of the 'United States of Europe' after the US Civil war. The quest for this only heightened after two World Wars with their terrible scourge. But only after the defeat of Nazism the New Europe's founding fathers like Winston Churchill, Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Altiero Spinelli, Walter Hallstein, Konrad Adenauer and many others supported by the aspirations of the general public launched the idea of a United Europe and European institutions. The goal was seemingly obvious – the restoration of the ruined economy, prevention of major future wars and curbing of the long-time German militarism and aggressiveness. The tacit underlying hope was to compete with the growing US preponderance and control over the Western part of the continent stimulated first by the 'Marshall Plan' and the creation of NATO where America was the dominating actor.

Moscow's attitude towards European integration

Thus the process of European integration was launched starting in 1948. It has proved that not only sovereign states can find satisfactory peaceful solutions to long-term disputes which had previously led to devastating conflicts, but also how they can explore opportunities through mutually beneficial cooperation rather than traditional competition.

Moscow regarded this with great and ever-growing suspicion as the consolidation of opposing economic and military potentials and a kind of springboard for its archrival the USA. Then and now Moscow made fun of the EU as a stooge and protectorate of the USA, an entity whose foreign policy and even economy are controlled from the other shore of the Atlantic. Then and now the Russian strategy was to unravel European integration, to confront it with its own integration projects and tear off Europe from the US command and cooperation. Therefore, Russia was closely monitoring the processes and constant crises in EU – with the idea of using any dissenting voices, factors and internal contradictions in the alliance present due to the natural differences and inequalities between its members. In this vein, Moscow had a stake in those European forces that argued for a constructive, respectful dialogue with Moscow.

Reasonable minds in Moscow understand that the eventual collapse of the EU (of which it is so fashionable now to speculate among the Russian 'pundits') would be something like 'the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 21st century' and could prompt greater unpredictability in the entire region. This is obvious in a situation where Europe remains a major economic partner for Russia with 42, 5 % of its foreign trade as well as the main political interlocutor and the major source of modern technologies

and know-how. Despite playing with the 'Third Energy package' the EU is unable to neutralise Gazprom's monopoly that only would become stronger with 'Nord Stream' I and II and the 'Turkish Stream' projects.

However, today, after the relations have soured so much, it is clear that Moscow and Brussels are to formulate and promote a new pattern of interaction having in mind how closely they are connected historically, economically and politically. Officially Moscow is pleading for reviving an equitable partnership and an even-handed cooperation between the EU and the Russia-dominated alliances and groupings. This could be a hard task in the ambience of a new self-assertive and stronger Russia and with the EU becoming more politicised and tumultuous, as both sides are turning into rather rigid, inflexible negotiating partners.

Russia's attitude towards the EU's foreign and security policy

So, what is the EU's place in the changing global environment? The new 'Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy', presented by High Representative Federica Mogherini and welcomed by all 28 EU leaders on 28 June 2017, intends to chart a course to the future. It stresses the need for a stronger Europe, especially now, in the aftermath of the UK referendum on EU membership. (Opinion polls have shown that 70% of EU citizens have been in favour of a common security and defence policy since 2002 and a recent survey confirmed that the European public wants the EU to play a more active role in world affairs).

Russia habitually questions the effectiveness and realism of the EU's CFSP. Moscow is not ready to backpedal or compromise in matters of principle, especially regarding Europe as a vastly fledgling community in the face of the much-hyped Russian 'resurgence'. However, the goal of enhancing ties and dialogue with Brussels, even in times of crisis and rising divergences is evident to many Russian experts and politicians.

That does not mean, of course, that Moscow will stop to exploit the growing weakness of European institutions: the organisational chaos which became clear after the eurozone crisis, the threats the unruly influx of migrants posed to EU unity, the worries about Grexit or Brexit or other new national referendums on a walkout, the rising asymmetrical economic development with varying speeds of integration, the general economic, political and social tensions, such as the widening of social inequality, the growing gap between the 'capitalist' elite and the majority of the population.

Many in the Russian political class observe that the entire EU integration infrastructure (at some point a matter of envy or even a model for Moscow) developed over decades of coordinating various interests, pulled by the 'Franco-German locomotive' and achieved by intricate negotiation processes over numerous complex issues, now passes through difficult times characterised by a growing populism, legitimacy collapse testing the limits of solidarity between Member States. All this could lead either to a kind of catharsis (like the Chinese see any crisis as a source for new opportunities) or to an imminent overall debacle. The economic crisis that started in 2008 has not yet ended.

The Russian authorities count on an unrelenting EU dependence on Russian gas, the growing pressure of the European business that allegedly loses billions of euros in the sanctions campaign and a growing resentment in European capitals against what is more and more seen as a 'Brussels Diktat'. Moreover, Moscow gurus opine that the EU – notwithstanding recently issued programmatic 'global influence' documents – lacks long-term vision, strategy or a guiding philosophy and is unable to cope with incoming challenges, not actually ready to assume novel responsibilities. Russian experts like to stress that almost no strictly political action plans since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty have proven very successful. They point to the 'crisis of normative leadership' when in the face of a rising Islamist terrorism threat and the migration conundrum several EU Member States pursue a course that openly contradicts the basic European values of tolerance and freedom of expression. The common line in such analysis is that the EU is now divided at least in three groups: Old Europe, New Europe and 'decrepit pariahs'. They emphasise that European unity is in crisis, and it remains unclear whether the EU can recover its overall effectiveness and its ability to promote the development of each Member State. Thus Moscow doubts that the idea that 'European integration emerges from each crisis stronger than before' is still valid.

The necessity of Russia-EU cooperation

However, the current turn of tide in European integration is not a sign of death. Germany will continue to pursue its long-time policy of EU consolidation trying to bring the integration process to its final stage. Also, many states are actually economically dependent on or benefit from Brussels. Even after a devastating Brexit, the EU will hold about 15% of the global GDP remaining a major economic player, third after the USA and China.

The EU will therefore remain a major partner for Russia, even despite the latter's growing alliance with China which is also a sign of its resentment with Europe's rebukes. Russia's much-touted 'Pivot to Asia' is more of a propaganda move; China could for example never provide the technology or managerial skills for Russia's modernisation plans – these are only attainable from the EU. (Still Russia is working hard to show it is reorienting eastwards; its trade with China in 2016 for the first time prevailing over the one with Germany. Russia has slid to fourth place after the US, China and Switzerland as the EU's trading partner).

A promising area of collaboration is, however paradoxical, the fight against the Islamist terrorist threat and cooperation on regional security issues. True, the Russian military never considered the EU a military heavyweight regarding it as just a logistic appendix to NATO – what many EU members' leaders never contradicted. So the claims of the threat of any imminent 'European army' to Russian security that are put forward in the wake of certain testing statements in Europe are just for PR and 'info war' usage. Actually, the EU enthusiasm over military cooperation has now practically disappeared; is restricted to limited policing or peacekeeping missions. At the same time, Russia could provide a model of excellence for coping with internal security, migration and terrorism problems, even despite concerns about its human rights' abuses that as Moscow retorts are necessary, just as in the USA, in order to provide for greater domestic security and public stability.

Ukraine, no doubt, remains the major salient dilemma. The sanctions adopted since 2014, have been the first since the Cold war and applying economic pressure on Moscow and continuously extended every half year, they have further exacerbated the bilateral tensions, actually rupturing many avenues of dialogue. They have instilled the feeling in Russian society, currently very keen on regaining almost great power status in world politics and military affairs, that the EU and Europe are not friendly partners and by no means a model for replication. Real progress has to be made on this issue before relations can return to normal. In my eyes it is clear that the Minsk II agreement frequently saluted by the leading EU members and its members in the Normandy format talks is almost defunct.

Furthermore, Moscow will observe jealously any EU attempts to extend its influence and presence in the post-Soviet are. This means that we could indeed expect growing tensions and competition regarding EU moves to strengthen cooperation not only with Kyiv but also with Moldova, Belarus, any Black Sea and Balkan states and even with the Central Asian countries. Consequently, Moscow would only be happy to see Eastern Partnership wither, as much as it understands that Brussels also will strive to prove that for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, the European Union remains a more attractive option than Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Therefore, many in Moscow's political circles are against the termination of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1997. Although somehow outdated, it provides guarantees of minimum legal protection to Russian economic interests. At the same time, in the current circumstances Moscow is not ready for any new initiatives to resume talks on a new strategic agreement that could practically lead nowhere, although potentially being a further stabilising factor (though Great Britain's departure demands possible revision of the document). On its part, Russia is ready for talks with individual states on important bilateral issues as migration, energy (including nuclear), science, cooperation in space, cyber security, the formation of a Greater Eurasian Partnership, etc.

Russia and the EU could also develop a 'road map' for the Eurasian Economic Union-EU dialogue, that besides many other things would help Moscow's dialogue with China and other Asian partners and could lead to a broader scheme 'from Shanghai to Kaliningrad', which is so far, of course, vastly infeasible.

In a broader context, Russia actually is a natural partner for the EU in discussing such topics as the migration crisis now haunting the EU, the situation in the Balkans, where Bosnia-Herzegovina still remains a powder keg, in the Greater Middle East and Northern Africa, specifically in Libya and Syria, in Iran and Iraq. HR Mogherini already suggested consultations on North Korean nuclear-missile issue, though I do not see how Moscow despite its recent accommodation proposals and UNSC permanent member status could be really helpful. Generally, there are, in my opinion, almost no controversies between the EU and Russia on the issues of arms control.

Neither Russia, nor the European Union are interested in a new version of Syria-like instability, an escalation of the current level of confrontation in Europe, especially in the Baltic area, with the new forces' deployments after 2014 developing into a full-scale arms race or, worse, a large-scale regional war involving a direct military conflict between Russia and NATO. Here the role of the EU as the European pillar of NATO cannot be overestimated.

The parties seem to agree on the importance to strengthen the crisis-management capabilities of the OSCE, its monitoring mechanisms in conflict areas, as well as on instruments for crisis prevention and resolution. They are now, not without friction, tested in the eastern Ukraine separatist-held areas.

It is of paramount importance to resume the military dialogue between Russia and NATO (with the active participation of its core EU members) and the US. The focus should be on developing new measures to prevent direct military collisions on the ground and in the air, sea and cyberspace, on creating constant channels of communication between defence ministries and military headquarters, and on developing new rules of conduct that would prevent dangerous military activity. Nothing meanwhile prevents the ever-eager regional arms control community to mull over and propose certain new ideas which might be useful when the time for them finally ripens.

As the Ukrainian issue is now the key irritant in the EU-NATO-Russia relations; what is rather more promising is a start of discussions of new outlines for a perspective European security architecture. It is important to avoid such conflicts in Europe in the future while maintaining the inviolability of borders and sovereignty of states, their territorial integrity, and at least, to preserve the spirit of Helsinki. At the same time, it is vitally important for the West to prevent 'Bosniasation' of the unarguably pro-Russian Ukrainian east; currently seized by leftist-separatists and or the creation of another eternal 'frozen conflict' in Europe (what might happen if peacekeepers are deployed there as separatists demand now).

Measures aimed at the restoration of a climate of mutual trust and cooperation

What is needed and can, apparently, be realised are various step-by-step, cautious measures aimed at the restoration of a climate of mutual trust and cooperation in the security sphere in Wider Europe.

These measures should be focused on a range of confidence-building measures and transparency-promoting mechanisms, primarily in the specific parts of the European theatre, with a special accent on the most endangered Baltic and Black Sea 'flanks'. This could arguably recover the current crisis and bring us into a new and safer dimension of 'hard' Euro-Atlantic security. While the American administration is now portrayed in Moscow as the worst, it seems that the initiative to breach the current stalemate must come from Russia's European neighbours (presumably, Germany as formerly the preferred Russian interlocutor) and would be in the interest of the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

These measures could include:

- Creation of a **joint group of unofficial experts which can suggest some new mechanisms and new tenets for strategic stability for the Euro-Atlantic theatre**, as it is clear that the Yalta-Potsdam order and the Helsinki regime of the 1970s have now been largely 'overtaken by events' (double track or 'old wise (wo)men' option). They could first work on the comparison of the Russian and Western approaches describing not just the present state of relations, but also the outlines of a suggested future, this mechanism could develop new principles and ideas on what practical measures could be introduced for greater transparency and pragmatic, efficient confidence-building measures, to start making the strategic doctrines of the two sides more

compatible and less mutually threatening, in short, how to disassemble the material remnants of the Cold War. Discussions to develop new outlines of global strategic stability – including, on the thorny issues of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) and non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNWs) could also be envisioned.

- At first, the experts can explore the principle and outlines of the envisioned future Euro-Atlantic security architecture as well as major challenges on this path and a programme of step-by-step accomplishments to ease the present-day tensions in relations, the role of institutions in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture (NATO, NATO-Russia Council, OSCE, EU, CSTO, Eurasian Union, etc.) and also the way toward improving the security of areas and states in the Euro-Atlantic region that are not members of any grouping or blocks.
- One could also suggest the establishment of a new set of communication links between the Russian and the NATO military that could enhance mutual predictability and foster the promotion of better comprehension and greater trust, based on timely notifications of future moves. The experts could develop the outlines of the system of notifications on military aviation flights and manoeuvres of naval vessels, i.e. in the Baltic and Black Seas (to avoid anxiety during the other side's manoeuvres or patrolling flights in the vicinity of other's borders). Both NATO and Russia could practice a broader system of inviting representatives to their respective manoeuvres and envision more joint peacekeeping and terrorist-fighting operations. It would be especially useful in conventional arms control in Europe, where efforts to revive the dialogue have failed.
- Both sides could, for example, examine what kind of positive security guarantees from Moscow, NATO member states, such as Poland and the Baltic countries, could await – in such term as local/regional transparency and confidence-building measures, greater openness about large scale military exercises in bordering areas and greater openness regime. The same counts for warning against planned snap exercises.
- Non-stationing of military assets and contingents, not having military manoeuvres close to the border with RF-NATO can also be discussed. Moscow could, in turn, demand more guarantees against the rapid deployment of NATO forces or at least some limits and more predictability regarding their deployment in eastern Europe.
- Moscow could, for example, assure the non-stationing or limitation of the number of 'Iskander-M' missiles in the Kaliningrad area and give guarantees for non-deployment of tactical nuclear weapons there. It would be interesting to return to examining the possibility of a non-nuclear zone in central (eastern) Europe –'Rapacki plan' under the present conditions.

In sum, what is needed is a package of crisis-de-escalation and prevention instruments such as sub-regional transparency and confidence-building measures, more openness on large-scale military exercises in border areas, strengthening of the inspections regime in a cost-effective way. Moscow could demand more guarantees against rapid deployment NATO forces which it regards as a threat (something like a no-troops-increase zone along the NATO-Russia borderland). This could eventually lead to a European security environment which would be acceptable and attractive both for Moscow and the West, while effectively precluding or quickly alleviating the outbreak of any major conflicts (such as the present one in Ukraine or the earlier 'frozen' ones).

This set of proposals may be too extensive and unrealistic for the moment. However, launching such a discussion process could lead us to the stabilisation of the current situation. Russia is deeply interested in good, solid relations with the West while the EU and NATO do not reject Moscow as a partner, i.e. suggesting a dialogue and cooperation between the Eurasian Economic Union and the EU or Moscow's collaboration in meeting new challenges – from Afghanistan, to WMD non-proliferation, to fighting the 'Islamic State' and Islamist terrorism or dealing with the new economic crisis.

In these difficult times, Russia and EU and NATO members must show that they are still active and responsible multilateral players. What is needed today is a programme to crush the deep-frozen ice packs

in bilateral relations and introduce a new set of confidence-building measures. That would bring about a new quality in the relations between Moscow and the West and strengthen mutual reliance and collaboration.

Today it is important to concentrate on the issues of implementation of existing arms control instruments such as the new START, INF or the OSCE's Vienna Document – preventing the outbreak of a novel arms race. It is critical that the current crisis does not undermine the traditional constructive collaboration between the United States and Russia on non-proliferation issues. P-5 seems now the only remaining place (despite the evident cooling of relations among the nuclear weapon states) where the Western members can push Moscow to be more receptive to new ideas on how to save the face of nuclear weapons' stakeholders, including the idea of a future multilateral dialogue on further reductions of strategic weapons – in view of the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

EU Member States and Russia must then engage in discussions over the control of conventional and nuclear arms, as well as the potential arms race in Europe, including tactical nuclear weapons and deployment of US-NATO missile defence.

It is especially viable in the conventional arms control in Europe which is now after Moscow's suspension of CFE in 2007. There are seemingly no clues how to revive it. The EU, NATO and Russia could work on the outlines of some sort of adapted follow-up to the CFE Treaty. Managing insecurity by regional Baltic Sea states through the kind of risk reduction and confidence-building measures and constructively resuming the dialogue at the NATO-Russia Council could be very propitious for the general climate of sanctions in the European region. This could potentially bring about the process of moving to lower numbers of 'tactical' nuclear arms in Europe in the future taking into account the dual-use role of their launchers.

Despite Moscow's current reticence, the EU and NATO could prod Russia into starting work on detailing and adapting the Vienna document which is the main guarantor of European stability and predictability in military matters.

The INF Treaty is also at stake – though Russian, EU and US experts put forward interesting ideas how to mend it and alleviate mutual suspicions through adopting a set on new MOUs describing and defining the areas of concern.

Generally, all this should lead to new efforts to develop a picture of an eventual European security ambiance which could be acceptable and attractive both for Moscow and the West. Outlines of a possible document (statement, declaration) can be worked out. That is why what I have in mind is a kind of 'long-term project' which will be noticed in expert and political community and, hopefully, influence the public discourse. This is, in my view, an urgent imperative of these tumultuous historic times when novel actions and the *New Thinking* is needed.

Russia remains – despite the recent fallbacks – an indispensable part of European civilisation. It could only applaud the 5 principles of RF-EU relations aired by the EU in 2016. We could then discuss the return to four common spaces declared in Saint-Petersburg in 2003.

Both the EU and Russia must propose the outlines of civilised relations, including the observance of agreed upon rules and norms of communication. The collapse of the EU as a key partner is not in Moscow's vital interests – though the deep divergences will continue to persist, especially on visa or the Ukraine-Crimea issues. What Russia needs is not a frail and fragmented, but rather an efficient and cohesive EU for successful cooperation on the large number of international issues, not least as a counterbalance to the USA or China, as well as it needs the EU as a major economic and technological partner. The EU, predictably, will remain critical of Moscow concerning human rights and domestic governance issues which can only aggravate close to the 2018 presidential elections in Russia. Still, both sides could think about negotiating a brief framework agreement as a kind of 'code of conduct' document.

Russia was and will remain a key European state and thus an inevitable partner and interlocutor for the European Union despite all persistent problems in their relations – and this requires a certain level of good faith and optimism.