

A stylized world map composed of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to represent specific countries or regions.

# Europe's Security Governance and Transatlantic Relations

## The West, Russia and Europe's Security Order

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- If one agrees that the Ukraine crisis is only the symptom, not the cause, of the current crisis in EU-Russian relations, a comprehensive rethinking of security in Europe between the EU and Russia is desperately needed. The EU and its member states cannot avoid some serious decision-making.
- Washington considers Russia to be merely a regional power. On the other hand history has shown that the country is able to destabilize the European security architecture. The lesson learned from the times of transformation is the fact that Russia has returned to the world arena.
- The fundamental problem is the seemingly unclear motivation behind Russian policy. It is not based on ideology and it is not based on economic rationality. The main driver seems to be Russia's threat perception. Action is then triggered by events which can include internal developments. Here lies the unpredictability of Russian foreign policy.
- Eastern European countries are in a very difficult position. After being unable to take advantage of newly available opportunities in the 1990s, they were looking for alternatives for the future. But if any of those led westward, Russia put up serious obstacles. The countries should be aware of the limits of both Russian and EU support.
- The platform for political dialogue could be the OSCE, because all involved countries are member states. To accomplish this one needs to accept the status quo of Crimea in order to change the status quo. While not formally recognising the annexation of the Crimea, the EU and the US should not allow it to obstruct dialogue.





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»Our wider region has become more unstable and more insecure«.

(Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy)

Since 2014 the foundation of the European security order has been under threat. The forgotten Cold War uncertainty as to a peaceful future is back. Russia, by annexing the Crimean peninsula and fomenting a civil war in Eastern Ukraine, has violated and questioned international law and principles, bringing the hitherto unprecedented peaceful cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation to an end.

As a result of Russia's actions, the US and EU agreed upon economic sanctions and visa bans for high-ranking Russian officials who participated in or supported the aggression. The two subsequent NATO summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016) revived the issue of deterrence against Russia. Philip M. Breedlove, until recently head of US European Command and NATO's Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR), sees Russia as an »enduring, global threat«.<sup>1</sup>

What went wrong with European security over the past quarter of a century? The future of European security looked so bright in 1990. The Paris Charter of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), based on the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, marked a new beginning: »The era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended. We declare that henceforth our relations will be founded on respect and co-operation.«<sup>2</sup> The same spirit could be found in the Vienna Document on confidence- and security-building measures.

Europe was at peace; the threat of war was gone. In the last days of the Soviet Union, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev understood the uselessness of the arms race, according to his adviser Anatoly Chernyaev, »because nobody would attack us even if we disarmed

completely«.<sup>3</sup> The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty came into force, preventing, through arms limitation and inspection, any build-up of military forces to overrun a neighbouring country. A cooperative, interest- and even value-based peace and security order in Europe seemed a reality.

But a state of increasing mistrust began in the nineties, which continued with the so-called »Coloured Revolutions« in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) and with NATO's eastward enlargement, US plans to install a missile defence system – which the Russians considered a threat to their nuclear deterrent – in Eastern Europe, NATO's offer to Georgia and Ukraine of a prospect for membership at an unspecified future time, and eventually Russia's war in Georgia in 2008. This worrying trend culminated in Russia's annexation of Crimea and the intervention in the Donbas.

There are no longer opposing blocs with contradicting ideologies. Disagreement no longer follows the line between the US and Western Europe on the one hand and Russia and the Eastern bloc on the other. Instead of two superpowers deciding the state of security in Europe there are now many more stakeholders, including six countries left stranded in the middle and whose interests all diverge – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. I would like to call these the BUMAGA region, after the Russian word for »paper«. The geographic »region« encompassing these six states exists, in fact, only on paper.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, this new conflict does not have a global magnitude (not to rival that of the Cold War) and is by no means the main challenge facing the world today. The EU, which is suffering from many internal issues, is confronted with the several threats and problems that affect the US and Russia as well: terror by religious extremists, the threat of the Islamic State in the Middle East, a self-confident China and a struggling Turkey. The new EU Global Strategy puts it bluntly: »We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union.«<sup>5</sup>

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1. Philip M. Breedlove: How to Handle Russia and other Threats, in: Foreign Affairs, June 13, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/1117656>.

2. OSCE »Charter of Paris for a New Europe«, Paris 1990, page 3.

3. David E. Hoffman, The Dead Hand, New York 2009, page 238.

4. The six countries, which are real, independent and sovereign states, have in common only the fact that they were once former Soviet republics. Terms such as »countries in-between« or »grey zone countries« could be interpreted as derogatory. And the EU term »Eastern Partnership« describes no physical geographical space.

5. Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, June 2016, page 7, [www.euglobalstrategy.eu](http://www.euglobalstrategy.eu).

This article will attempt to analyse whether there are any lessons from the Cold War and the period of East European transition which could be useful in today's turbulent times. With this aim, the history of the Cold War will be briefly examined, as well as different threat perceptions since 1991. The article will look at the interests of the EU, US and Russia – and the BUMAGA countries – with regard to security in Europe. It will end with some brief policy recommendations, which will be divided into short-, medium- and long-term measures.

## 1. Looking Back at Cold War Security

»Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.«

(John F. Kennedy, president of the United States, 1961)

One of the main questions during the Cold War was whether the Soviet Union or the US was seeking superiority over the other by preparing for and hoping to be able to win a nuclear war. In an attempt to find an answer, 40 years ago the CIA organised an intellectual exercise by setting up two teams of experts. Team A consisted of employees of the CIA, Team B of outsiders mostly critical of détente.

Team A came to the cautious conclusion that the Soviets »cannot be certain about future U.S. behavior or about their own future strategic capabilities relative to those of the U.S.«<sup>6</sup> Team B, in contrast, found that the worst-case scenario, according to which Soviet leaders »think not in terms of nuclear stability (...) but of an effective nuclear war-fighting capability«, seemed more plausible. As we now know, the findings of Team B turned out to be less accurate. But at the time they fit the Zeitgeist and were seen to be on target.

After World War II, advisors such as George F. Kennan and Henry Kissinger designed various strategies of containment for the United States. According to Kennan, Soviet foreign policy »arises mainly from basic inner-Russian necessities«.<sup>7</sup> A US National Security Council study in 1955 confirmed this by stating that the Soviet Union's number one objective was the »security of the regime

of the U.S.S.R.«, number two »maintaining the Soviet hold on the European satellites« and number three »the elimination of U.S. influence from Eurasia«.<sup>8</sup>

After a period of deterrence sparked by the Cuba crisis, the administration of US President Richard Nixon changed gears towards détente. Nixon's national security advisor Henry Kissinger had concluded that power in the world was multidimensional, that conflict and harmony are inherent in international relations and that any national foreign policy had to take its own limits into consideration.<sup>9</sup>

Détente meant cooperation where possible and resistance where necessary. NATO's »Hornel Report« came to the same conclusion in 1967. Détente was also understood as an approach intended not to change the Kremlin's historic belief in security and spheres of influence but to make clear that cooperation with the West was in the best interests of all parties involved.

According to Kissinger, influencing and changing the domestic policy of the Soviet Union ought not to be the aim of talks. But, Kissinger believed, it was up to the US and its allies »to define the limits of Soviet aims«.<sup>10</sup> Easy and difficult problems were always to be tackled together. That was the common understanding of both Egon Bahr, advisor to West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, and Kissinger himself during a meeting in Washington in 1969. They agreed that talks between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union could prove useful. This became Germany's New Eastern Policy (or *Ostpolitik*): to pursue Germany's unification by »change through rapprochement«. No attempt to bring democracy to Moscow was implied.

Progress was made on arms control. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, three agreements were signed: the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT 1). But more was badly needed. When Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev met for the first time in Geneva in 1985 each country had an arsenal of 60,000 nuclear warheads. After the summit both leaders agreed that a nuclear war

6. David E. Hoffman: *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and its Dangerous Legacy*, New York 2009, page 21f.

7. John Lewis Gaddis: *Strategies of Containment*, Oxford University Press 2005, page 19.

8. Gaddis, page 140.

9. Gaddis, page 275ff.

10. Gaddis, page 283.

could not be won and should never be attempted.<sup>11</sup> It was the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

The benefits of US-Soviet arms control arrangements are still felt today. Nonetheless, even to the present time three major problems remain unresolved. Firstly, the atomic arsenal of both countries, which has been reduced substantially, is still powerful enough to destroy the planet several times over. Secondly, the security status of Eastern Europe – although by »Eastern Europe« we no longer mean the EU members of East Central Europe but the countries of the BUMAGA region – remains undefined. And thirdly, since the dissolution of the Eastern military alliance – the Warsaw Pact – the discrepancy between the firepower of NATO and that of the Russian Federation, even if one takes into consideration the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), is a disconcerting fact for the latter.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Threat Perceptions throughout 25 years of Transformation

»They've got to know that there's something worth waiting for after all this hardship.«  
(President Bill Clinton 1998)

In the process of making decisions, perception is the first step, followed by analysis, which takes perception into account, and finalized by policy decisions.<sup>13</sup> That perception plays an important role in the current conflict can be seen from the final report of the panel of experts commissioned by the OSCE.<sup>14</sup> The report's recommendations were crafted so as to fit the diverging narratives from »the West«, from »Moscow« and from the »states in-between« (the BUMAGA countries) of the history of post-Cold War Europe.

It is clear that both the outcome of the Cold War and the events of the 1990s hold the roots of today's crisis. Western powers mistook Moscow's inability to block the post-Cold War order as support for it. Russia was

no longer seen as a threat but as a poor country trying to cope with huge problems – domestically, economically and internationally. It had lost a territory larger than the EU. Some 25 million ethnic Russians suddenly found themselves living in a foreign country.

US President Bill Clinton saw the problem and understood that his country and those of Western Europe had to deliver: »They've got to know that there's something worth waiting for after all this hardship.« But this peace dividend did not materialise for Russia. In fact, the opposite occurred. Whereas Poland's debt of 15 billion US dollars was written off, Russia – as the successor of the Soviet Union – was required to pay the entire debt.<sup>15</sup>

And NATO advanced eastward, even though talks with Soviet president Gorbachev and later with Russian president Boris Yeltsin had initially suggested otherwise. US Secretary of State James Baker said in February 1990 that NATO would not expand eastward and his colleague Warren Christopher mentioned partnership, rather than membership, for countries in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Moscow saw itself as being constantly on the defensive and repeatedly humiliated. Russia's long-preserved security balance was gone. The perceived danger was less Western aggressive behaviour, as Treisman points out, than »Western ignorance combined with overconfidence«.<sup>17</sup> Market economy and democracy were presumed to be the only game in town and the US government was actively supporting democracy promotion, something never attempted during the Cold War. Russia interpreted this approach as an intervention in domestic affairs, starting with the events in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004.

One should not forget, however, how Russia alienated its Western partners and the countries of the BUMAGA region. The definition of the »Near Abroad« as being a sphere of Russian influence, in conjunction with Moscow's announcement of its intention to protect Russians abroad, sent shivers throughout the region. The assumption was that Russia again had an expansionist agenda.

11. Hoffman, page 475.

12. »Gegen den Warschauer Pakt«, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 9.7.2016. The article is mainly referring to the Military Balance 2016 by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. NATO (chiefly the US) has 2330 nuclear warheads; Russia has 1790.

13. David Brooks, The Social Animal, New York 2011, page 150ff.

14. Back to Diplomacy, Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project, 2015.

15. Daniel Treisman, The Return, New York 2011, page 313f.

16. James Goldgeier, Promises Made, Promises Broken?, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/07/promises-made-promises-broken-what-yeltsin-was-told-about-nato-in-1993-and-why-it-matters/>

17. Treisman, page 321.

This has been deeply rooted in the thinking of leaders in Washington and Western European capitals ever since the Soviet Union's expansion to the West after World War II. And because of this traumatic historical experience, combined with Russian behaviour and uncertainty about Russia Western-oriented Central Eastern and Eastern European states longed for hard security and NATO membership.

Russia is seen as an unpredictable power because of its authoritarian government, which harasses political opposition, the media and foreign as well as national NGOs. The logic goes that the Kremlin is pursuing an imperial foreign policy to regain the country's lost spheres of influence and most importantly for the leadership to stay in power.<sup>18</sup> With the war in Georgia, Russia put its criticism into action, boosted by its oil-driven economic recovery and supported by the perception among the populace that the West had betrayed the nation. The Kremlin started that narrative early on but especially after the Coloured Revolutions and the accession to NATO of the Baltic countries. Moscow gradually concluded that a Russian integration into Western structures was impossible.

The Kremlin condemned the street protests against the alleged rigging of the State Duma elections in 2011, which saw President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party triumph, as being supported and financed by the EU and the US. The large popular demonstrations in Ukraine in favour of closer links with the EU were seen as a present danger to Russia's security because of a possible NATO membership for Ukraine implying the presence of the alliance only 300 miles away from Moscow.

These developments put the BUMAGA countries in a very difficult position. After being unable to take advantage of newly available opportunities in the 1990s, because of internal upheaval and the need to secure stability, they were looking for alternatives for the future. But if any of those led westward, Russia put up serious obstacles.

### 3. Analysis of the State of Security in an Age of Insecurity

#### 3.1 EU

»The EU will promote a rules-based global order.«  
(EU Global Strategy, 2016)

For the first time the EU is being challenged as the only possible model for organizing European governance. »The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned«, warns the EU's High Representative Federica Mogherini. The Union is challenged by massive migration, by the economic underperformance of some countries and by populist, anti-EU movements in member states. And the UK is about to leave the EU by popular will.

Brussels understands that »security at home depends on peace beyond our borders«.<sup>19</sup> For the last seven years the EU had two policy concepts towards the East. One was the Eastern Partnership. It was initiated after the war in Georgia to create a neighbourhood of peaceful and prosperous friends along the borders of the Union. What was not meant to be a second eastward expansion was nonetheless perceived by Russia as a geopolitical move and a security threat – leading first to membership in the EU and then in NATO.

The other concept was the Partnership for Modernization with Russia. But whereas Moscow concentrated on technical and economic cooperation, Brussels was also interested in cooperation in the spheres of rule of law, human rights and political pluralism. Already during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2012) clouds of mistrust and misperception had begun to darken the once clear skies of cooperation. After 2013 it became evident that the two goals of the EU were basically in contradiction with each other.

The EU's Eastern policy has turned out to be an unsuccessful story. Too much sleepwalking has occurred.<sup>20</sup> In

18. See for example Karen Darwisha: *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who owns Russia?*, New York 2014.

19. EU Global Strategy, page 7.

20. This is a reference to Christopher Clark's book about the outbreak of World War I and compares the slow political process with Russia's and EU's policy towards the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Hiski Haukkala: *A Perfect Storm; or what went wrong and what went right for the EU in Ukraine*, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1156055>, page 10; Reinhard Krumm: *Krimkrise: Die Schlafwandler des 21. Jahrhunderts*, [www.ipg-journal.de/rubriken/](http://www.ipg-journal.de/rubriken/)





spite of the EU's goal of supporting and fostering »stability, security and prosperity« there, the region between the EU and Russia has become an area of instability with an unclear future. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which signed the Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU, are not in control of all their territory, Belarus and Armenia are members of the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and Azerbaijan is wavering between the two. The only country which is actively looking both ways is EEU member Armenia, which is negotiating a new, legally binding and overarching agreement with the EU.

In response to the lack of progress, Brussels reviewed its Neighbourhood Policy in 2015.<sup>21</sup> The most urgent challenge is now stability. The report stated the need to »reflect EU interests and the interests of our partners«. The EU will seek tailor-made approaches. It also plans to reach out to other partners (including, of course, Russia) for cooperation, even though »it is the sole right of the EU and its partners to decide how they want to proceed in their relation«. At the same time Brussels acknowledges in its Global Strategy that the »EU and Russia are interdependent«.

If one agrees that the Ukraine crisis is only the symptom, not the cause, of the current crisis in EU-Russian relations, a comprehensive rethinking of security in Europe between the EU and Russia is desperately needed. The EU and its member states cannot avoid some serious decision-making. So far the vision of a common space between Vladivostok and Lisbon is still on the table. The EU should look at its interests and especially its limits to pursue a pragmatic policy based on its values.

### 3.2 US

»American leadership in this century, like the last, remains indispensable.«  
(National Security Strategy of the USA, 2015)

Since the end of the Cold War the relationship between the US and Russia has undergone four »resets«,<sup>22</sup> starting with US President George Bush (1989–1993), who worked on disarmament at Russia's greatest time of weakness. The Clinton administration (1993–2001) tried to continue good relations but set NATO's enlargement in motion with the aim of bringing the period of division between Western and Eastern Europe to an end. Ironically, these actions instead precipitated the emergence of a new divide. All of this occurred during the Yeltsin presidency, which is viewed very negatively by the Russian people. Under US President George W. Bush (2001–2009) relations deteriorated dramatically and have not yet recovered. His presidency, with the US involvement in Iraq, still hovers as a dark shadow over US-Russian relations. Barack Obama (2009-present), with his pragmatic view that involving Russia could be successful in certain areas – such as a new START agreement, negotiations with Iran and restoring some sort of stable government in Afghanistan – initiated the fourth reset. Expectations were limited; a strategic partnership was hardly envisioned.

The role of the US in solving global problems and promoting a world order was undisputed in the 1990s. Certainly Russia was not in a position to act against it. But already in 1995 the US could observe that Russia was leaving the path of cooperation with the West and was instead focusing on its own neighbourhood, with the aim »to rebuild Russia's sphere of influence«<sup>23</sup>, which was one reason why the US administration's hopes for a strategic partnership with Russia were diminishing. A possible comeback for Russia as a global player was not a scenario Washington was either willing to imagine or willing to accept.

It was Russia's striving towards its historical spheres of influence, rather than the increasingly authoritarian drive initiated by Putin during his first two-term spell as president (2000–2008), which angered Washington. Russia was seen as punching above its weight because of its weak economic performance. But this is only relevant to a certain extent, since Russia still had enough firepower or bureaucratic leverage to inflict serious harm. Under

aussen-und-sicherheitspolitik/artikel/krimkrise-die-schlafwandler-des-21-jahrhunderts-295/.

21. Review of the European Neighborhood Policy, Brussels 18.11.2015, [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015151118\\_joint-communication\\_review-of-the-enp\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015151118_joint-communication_review-of-the-enp_en.pdf).

22. Angela Stent: *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press 2014, page 259.

23. Eugene B. Rumer: *Russian National Security and Foreign Policy in Transition*, Santa Monica 1995, page 53.

the younger Bush, Washington completely neglected to pursue a long-term policy of engagement of Russia.

The US administration under Obama put less emphasis on European affairs because of the strategic pivot to Asia and many other challenges, particularly in the Middle East. But Russia's involvement in Ukraine brought the US back. The administration's approach after Russia's annexation of Crimea could be described as »neither fighting nor appeasing«.<sup>24</sup> President Obama made clear that Ukraine is not a core interest and not something that the US would go to war for.<sup>25</sup> Instead Washington, and the EU, decided that Russia would have to pay a price for its aggression, in the form of sanctions. Later in 2016 the administration initiated a back channel between Assistant US Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and Russian presidential advisor Vladislav Surkov to ease tensions in Ukraine and support the Minsk II package of measures aimed at pacifying the country. But so far there are no signs that the US has plans to demand Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO.

The foundation of Washington's Russia policy is described in its National Security Strategy 2015. The US »will continue to impose significant costs on Russia through sanctions« and »deter Russian aggression«.<sup>26</sup> How to possibly proceed is explained in a combined expert paper by the Atlantic Council, Brookings Institution and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs: »Maintaining Western sanctions are critical but not by themselves sufficient«. The report asks for more military assistance for Ukraine, »including lethal defensive arms«.<sup>27</sup> So far this has not happened.

But in times of shifting priorities because of global terrorism different approaches are being put forward. A recently published article in Foreign Affairs argues that the US should »remain offshore as long as possible« before it commits itself overseas. That would only happen under the condition of support and heavy lifting by its allies.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from sanctions, deterrence is considered to be the most important instrument for stopping further Russian aggression. NATO did exactly that at the Warsaw Summit with the decision to establish an enhanced forward presence in the Baltic countries and Poland. The need for containment is understandable if one sees the reason for the crisis only in the aggressive behaviour of Russia's authoritarian elite. But what must also be done is to find common ground to start tackling the above-mentioned unresolved issues of the Cold War.

On the one hand Washington considers Russia to be merely a regional power. On the other hand history has shown that the country is able to destabilize the European security architecture. The lesson learned from the times of transformation is the fact that Russia has returned to the world arena. Wouldn't now be the time to start a strategic dialogue about security in the 21st century in Europe? The US, its EU partners and some of the BUMAGA countries share at least some common challenges with Russia. For decision-makers in Washington it is time to return to the pragmatic thinking of the Cold War, rather than remain in the superpower role the US enjoyed during the time of transformation of Eastern Europe.

### 3.3 Russia

»Russia is not a project. Russia is a destiny.«  
(President Vladimir Putin, 2013)

Russia has a long history of relying on spheres of influence or buffer zones to secure its territory. During a talk with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1997, President Yeltsin argued that »the security of all European countries depends on Russia feeling secure«.<sup>29</sup> Early on Russia wanted to be the country which guaranteed stability and security in the post-Soviet space. Already in 1994 the Ministry of Defence's newspaper Red Star published an article with the headline »The near abroad was, is and will be the sphere of vital interests of Russia«.<sup>30</sup>

24. Gideon Rose: What Obama gets right, Foreign Affairs, September/October 2015.

25. Jeffrey Goldberg: The Obama Doctrine, The Atlantic, April 2016.

26. National Security Strategy of the USA, [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf).

27. Ivo Daalder et al: Preserving Ukraine's Independence, Resisting Russian Aggression: What the United States and NATO must do, Washington D.C. 2015, page 1.

28. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt: The Case of Offshore Balancing, Foreign Affairs, June 13, 2016, Washington D.C. 2016, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/1117543>.

29. According to Strobe Talbott, The Russia Hand, New York 2002, page 225.

30. Red Star (Krasnaya Zvezda), 20.1.1994.

An equilibrium of security in the post-Soviet space has still not been reached, despite the CSCE and OSCE process. Russia accuses the US of having constantly changed the rules dominating the European security system in 1990–91 by promoting NATO's central eastward enlargement, and of having made the world a more dangerous place through interventions in the Middle East. Meanwhile, what NATO and its member states called aggression in Georgia Russian expert Sergey Karaganov described as self-defence with an »iron fist«.<sup>31</sup>

In between the events in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia under President Dmitry Medvedev came up with proposals aimed at reshaping the European security system so that Russia would find itself, as his think tank INSOR wrote, »surrounded by friends«.<sup>32</sup> The plan for a new European security system was based on the idea of re-negotiating Helsinki. According to Moscow, European security needed a new direction, as the one marked by NATO's enlargement had made Russia an outsider. The proposal was discussed within the OSCE in the framework of the so-called Corfu process. Yet the results of this OSCE-led debate did not go farther than the rhetorical commitment included in the Astana Declaration, which the Corfu process presented as sustaining »the vision of a comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible security community throughout our shared OSCE area«.<sup>33</sup>

This was evidently not good enough for Russia. The Kremlin took note of what it perceived as the West's unwillingness to discuss a substantial revision of the European security system. In the following years, its stance hardened. Russia's National Security Strategy of December 31, 2015<sup>34</sup> clearly stated that competition between the West and Russia – over geopolitical interests as well as values – was again the game in town. The Strategy framed Russia as a global player with a rightful claim to a sphere of influence and US policy towards Russia as containment-driven. NATO was explicitly indicated as a threat. In response, the Strategy committed Russia to

modernising its army and bolstering troop deployments along its western flank. It is a sign of Russia's resolve to play hardball with the West that it has determined to pursue a confrontational – and expensive – course at a time when its energy-driven economy is suffering from low oil and gas prices (rather than from Western sanctions, whose effects have been modest).

In spite of its shrinking financial resources, Russia feels strong enough to have a decisive say in the European security system. But it also wants to secure its interests in the Eurasian zone. One of the instruments for achieving this is the EEU. For Russia it is the only chance to have a say in the common neighbourhood from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Membership in the EU or NATO is not an option; neither is being a junior partner of China.

In a recent article, Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lvov, has laid down a vision of Russia's global role that connects the country's geopolitical interests with its values and history. Russia was never an outsider in Europe, he argues, just the opposite. It has therefore no structural interest in permanent confrontation with the EU and NATO. On the contrary, Russia aspires to be a bridge between civilizations. Lavrov agrees with French historian Hélène Carrère d'Encausse that »history has granted Russia the destiny to fulfil the great mission of connecting East and West«<sup>35</sup>.

But how believable are these words of a high-ranking politician? The fundamental problem is the seemingly unclear motivation behind Russian policy. It is not based on ideology and it is not based on economic rationality. The main driver seems to be Russia's threat perception. Action is then triggered by events which can include internal developments.<sup>36</sup> Demonstrations against president Putin lead to an even more difficult relationship with the US. Here lies the unpredictability of Russian foreign policy. Precisely because of this, the decision makers of the EU and the US act as if an attack on NATO – which no previous Russian or Soviet leader has ever attempted and which seems highly unlikely – could still be seen as a policy option for today's Russia.

There is one more important factor. In contrast to the final years of the Soviet Union, when the population in

31. Interview with Sergey Karaganov: An iron fist to keep NATO expansion at bay, Moscow 2011, Russia in Global Affairs, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/An-iron-fist-to-keep-NATO-expansion-at-bay-15130>

32. Institute of Contemporary Development (INSOR): Attaining the Future, Moscow 2011, [www.insor-russia.ru/files/INSOR\\_Attaining\\_The\\_Future\\_final.pdf](http://www.insor-russia.ru/files/INSOR_Attaining_The_Future_final.pdf).

33. Astana Commemorative Declaration Towards a Security Community, 2.12.2010.

34. Strategiya natsionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiskoi Federatsii (Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation), 31.12.2015, <https://publication.pravo.gov.ru>.

35. Sergey Lavrov: Istoricheskaya perspektiva vneshnei politiki Rossii, in Rossiya v globalnoi politike, Moskva 2016, Nr. 2, page 8ff.

36. Bobo Lo: Russia and the New World Order, London 2014, page 35f.

general had lost faith and respect for the Communist Party's ability to govern, today the Russian people support the government's foreign policy. This marks a crucial difference between now and the Cold War. Discontent about the economic situation is as pervasive now as it was then and in fact, the traditional inclination of Russians to criticise the state for failing to deliver on economic and social welfare might be even more pronounced than in Soviet times.<sup>37</sup> Citizens freely badmouth their daily circumstances – yet praise the country's leadership. Identity trumps economics.

### 3.4 Countries of the BUMAGA region

»Georgia is committed to the principle that all nations have the right to choose their own strategic path for future development, as well as the alliances they want to join.«

(National Security Concept of Georgia)

The six countries of the BUMAGA region are torn between two different integration models. This competition symbolises the biggest challenge for European security. The good news is that no concert of powers will decide for them what they can do. The bad news is that all six countries are unable to choose their own path without risking their independence. The countries diverge in the following ways:

- a) Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have signed an AA and a DCFTA with the EU.
- b) Belarus is a member of the EEU and participates in the EU's Eastern Partnership.
- c) Armenia is a member of the EEU but is negotiating a new agreement with the EU and participates in the Eastern Partnership.
- d) Azerbaijan participates in the Eastern Partnership.

According to the national security concepts of these countries, their main objective is to stay independent and ensure territorial integrity. That alone poses a challenge because five of the six countries (all but Belarus) have on-

going territorial conflicts in which Russia plays a central role. Russia uses these conflicts to put pressure on the governments to augment its sphere of influence.

The six countries have to tackle four more problems. First are the restrictions they face with regard to their options for obtaining credible security. In 2008 Georgia paid a heavy price for its attempt to resolve the territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia against Russia's wishes. The Kremlin used that as a pretext for an armed intervention which, as I discussed above, was meant to convey to NATO and the US the message that Russia was determined to keep as much influence as possible over its nearest abroad. Ukraine made the same mistake when it ignored Russia during the talks with Brussels about the AA and DCFTA. Brussels also failed. Georgia and Ukraine want to join the EU and NATO now, yet Russia's interventions have rendered the prospect quite remote.<sup>38</sup>

The countries that have signed the AA with the EU may eventually undergo a second economic and political transformation through approximation to EU standards (at least this is the EU's ambition). This new transition may prove even harder than the transition from communism to free market in the 1990s, if the social and economic hardships associated with the reform process further strain a society impatient for a better life. The first transformation of the last 25 years did not build a suitable foundation for the second one, since it was not geared towards Western integration.

Thirdly, the region is facing competition between two integration models, the EU and the EEU. One of the consequences could be that these economically weak states will receive either EU or Russian support but not both. This would severely restrict the policy options at their disposal, and turn them into pawns of a broader conflict.

Finally, they should also be aware of the limits of both Russian and EU support. The Eastern Partnership is not a priority for the EU at the moment, and an economically struggling Russia has less support for the EEU. What should be avoided – and must be in the interests of all countries involved – is a new dividing line. A confrontational approach between the two integration models would be counterproductive to the EU's goal of achieving

37. Look at the Levada website for its weekly opinion polls: [www.levada.ru](http://www.levada.ru).

38. For Georgia: [www.mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy?NationalSecurityConcept.aspx](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy?NationalSecurityConcept.aspx) and for Ukraine: [www.president.gov.ua](http://www.president.gov.ua).

stability and prosperity in the whole of Europe and it would also complicate the establishment of economic ties among the countries involved.<sup>39</sup> Ukraine is an example.

## 4. Policy Recommendations

»Renew dialogue, rebuild trust, restore security.«  
(Motto of the German OSCE chairmanship 2016)

The worst-case scenario of an uncontrolled military conflict in Europe is no longer inconceivable. The biggest challenge for Europe's security is that a norm-based cooperative security system is for the time being not possible and that the interests of Russia and the countries of the BUMAGA region are not always compatible. Despite the fact that almost all involved parties have signed the Paris Charter (the Soviet Union did, but the now-independent countries of the BUMAGA region have not), borders in Europe have been changed by Russia through military action. The understanding of the overall principle of respecting law over power has been questioned. That was the foundation of the agreement of the 35 states of the CSCE in 1975, and that should be the same today for the 57 states of the OSCE. Now, however, there are major differences:

- The EU wants no spheres of influence even though the Eastern Partnership can be seen as exactly that.
- The US strives for global leadership.
- Russia insists for historical reasons on its right to a sphere of influence.
- The BUMAGA countries want to secure their right to freely choose their own path towards stability and prosperity.

Europe is entering a phase where the continent is again drifting apart – the opposite of the post-Cold War era, when Europe was coming together. NATO enlargement gave Central Eastern Europe stability, but moved the

instability eastwards because it left Russia out of a European security framework.

Lessons can be learned. One is that there should not be a choice between containment or engagement but a combination of both. The third way could be 'Congagement', which was elaborated by experts from RAND at the end of the 20th century to deal with China.<sup>40</sup> Later the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt transferred the idea to Russia.<sup>41</sup> Both approaches are used in a flexible way according to the security needs and the vision of the future security order in Europe.

Another lesson is to use the OSCE more, which has been mostly neglected during the last few years. One part of Europe has been united by the EU and NATO, whereas the remaining part is weak and mostly isolated. The OSCE is the only organisation which unites all countries involved in the Ukrainian conflict and encompasses the common space from Vladivostok to Vancouver.

The three goals of the OSCE under the chairmanship of Germany in 2016 – renew dialogue, rebuild trust, restore security – define the different time frames of the recommendations below.<sup>42</sup> The preconditions are political interest and a will from all sides to compromise, to look at Russia as a rational power and not some unfathomable land, and to concede that Russia's future is not predetermined.

### 4.1 Short Term: Renew Dialogue

Create an atmosphere of dialogue and restraint between Russia, the EU, the BUMAGA region and the US. Soft issues, such as a de-escalation of the almost-war rhetoric through back channels and civil society, should be encouraged. A double dialogue as proposed by German Foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier should be pursued, linking easy and difficult issues. A major plus in comparison with the Cold War are the societal connec-

39. Laure Delcour, Hrant Kostanyan, Bruno Vandecasteele & Peter Van Elsuwege: The implications of Eurasian Integration for the EU's Relations with the Countries in the post-Soviet space. Ghent 2015, Studia Diplomatica, 68-1, page 5–33.

40. Zalmay M. Khalilzad: The United States and a Rising China, RAND, Santa Monica 1999.

41. Matthias Dembinski, Hans-Joachim Schmidt, Hans-Joachim Spanger: Einhegung: Die Ukraine, Russland und die europäische Sicherheitsordnung, Frankfurt 2014.

42. For recommendations also see, among others, Wolfgang Richter: Foundations and Crisis of the European Peace and Security Order, Berlin 2015; Third Report from the Deep Cuts Commission: Back from the Brink, Hamburg 2016, [deepcuts.org/publications/reports/](http://deepcuts.org/publications/reports/); Chatham House Report: The Russian Challenge, London 2015.



tions in the form of sister cities, university exchanges and civil society dialogues.

#### 4.2 Medium Term: Rebuild Trust

Trust-building measures between Russia, the EU, the BUMAGA countries and the US should be initiated through islands of cooperation on the regional and global level; and interdependence among the states should be based upon respect for the principles of international law. The implementation of Minsk II would be the priority but there are other means, such as historical reconciliation, which attempt to reduce the gap in diverging perceptions. Because, at the moment, each side remains confident that it was the other side which provoked the conflict. Another field could be conventional arms control, seeking to revitalise one of the cornerstones of European security, the CFE treaty.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.3 Long Term: Restore Security

Through restored dialogue and rebuilt trust, the task to create a European security order based on international law must be initiated by all stakeholders. The foundation, the Helsinki Final Act and Paris Charter, is already in place. Initiating a profound trade dialogue between the EU and EEU would be one step for a common human and economic space between Vladivostok and Vancouver. This approach could also be seen as a way to escape the either/or choice the BUMAGA countries are facing now. The grand vision could be a shared European house.<sup>44</sup> The task is difficult because at the moment Russia does not want to be integrated, nor does it want a strategic partnership with the EU or the US. But at the same time Russia is very much interested in a dialogue on regional security.

The platform could be the OSCE, because all involved countries are member states. To accomplish this one needs to accept the status quo of Crimea in order to change the status quo. While not formally recognising

the annexation of the Crimea, the EU and the US should not allow it to obstruct dialogue. The aim would be a European security architecture which includes a Russia without Crimea and without aspirations towards Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union.

43. The US and its NATO allies within CFE have refused to ratify the adopted treaty of 1999 (ACFE), Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine have. The reason is that Russia has not withdrawn weapons according to the treaty limits from Georgia and Moldova. Report of the Arms Control Association, [www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe](http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/cfe).

44. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Report: A Shared European Home, Berlin 2016, [library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/12546.pdf](http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/12546.pdf).



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