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Russia's Alignment with Europe: Pursuing a Euro-Atlantic Agenda?

The article discusses Russia's European policy in the wake of September 11, 2001 and in the context of dual enlargement of NATO and the EU. Although under Putin some significant changes occurred in Russia's foreign policy, it is not free of inconsistency and ambiguity. There are tensions in Russia's vision of the Euro-Atlantic community between a focus on the United States as a super-power and Europe as a growing power. Despite this, Putin's policy course seems to be set: to seek the closest possible alignment with the Euro-Atlantic community without merging into it. The EU is one stand in Putin's strategy of alignment. This article provides analysis of Russia's current dialogue with the EU, including the security area, outlines the impediments to their engagement and looks at the prospects for Russia's further alignment with the Euro-Atlantic community.

Introduction

The interrelationship of Russia and Europe goes far beyond the narrow focus of diplomatic ties and foreign policy. Indeed, it concerns the question of the fundamental orientation of Russian society itself, encompassing a specific culture and civilization. Geographically, Europe and Russia are overlapping entities. Half of Europe is Russia; half of Russia is in Europe. It is true that geography contributes to this political ambivalence. However, politics, in contrast to geography, does not necessarily take this as axiomatic – either in Europe or in Russia. Arguments about Russia's relationship to European civilization always reflect the ongoing debates involving European interdependence, Russia's distinct national character and its historic path of development. For most of their history, Russians have continually pondered the question: “are we part of Europe?” Regardless of the answer, it is undeniable that the European vector has played the leading role in determining Russia's foreign policy for the past several centuries.

At every major turning point in the continent's history – be it the defeat of Napoleon's empire or the formation of the Entente Cordiale – Russia has played an

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active and indispensable part in the European concert, and has been an integral part of the overall European balance. In the twentieth century Russia's role in European affairs increased even more, despite the ideological, military and political backlash throughout much of Europe in response to the tremors of revolution in Russia and the stormy events in the Soviet Union, resulting in its collapse.

Russian foreign policy has been far from unchanging in its relations with Europe. However, while after the "honeymoon" period, which ended fairly swiftly after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's relations with Western Europe became more conditional and fraught (since the mid-1990s), a co-operative trend did not disappear¹. Russia has been generally positive with respect to EU enlargement. The present interaction of Russia and Europe is considerably influenced by the current changes in the international political landscape: the enlargement and simultaneous transformation of NATO and the European Union, the events of September 11, 2001, the Iraq war, and so forth. Above all, the residual superpower syndrome affects Russia's relations with Europe.

Gorbachev's use of the term "common European home" dates back to the late 1980s, and similar expressions can be found in almost every important document signed by Western European institutions and Russia since that time. For example, the EU Commission document on the strategy for relations with Russia, dated June 4, 1999, states that "a stable, democratic and prosperous Russia, firmly anchored in a united Europe free of dividing lines, is essential to lasting peace on the continent"². Accordingly, a document of the Russian Federation of October 1999 setting out the country's strategy regarding the EU ("*The Russian Federation Middle Term Strategy Towards the European Union (2000-2010)*") refers to Russia's commitment to cooperate in the building "of a united Europe without dividing lines"³.

The initial focus of Vladimir Putin's rapprochement with the West was Europe. Already during his first year in office he saw the European Union as Russia's main foreign partner, instrumental for the country's transformation. Putin seeks Russia's integration into Europe for economic reasons; it is mainly in Europe that markets and potential investment lie. Russia started to formulate its policy towards Europe based on the conviction that Europe can and should become a starting point of universal strategic stability across the globe. Further on, especially after September 11, 2001, the divisions between the United States and Europe, and within Europe, raise two vital questions for Russia. Is the West united and finished as a concept? If not, with which West should Russia seek to align?

The purpose of this article is to examine Russia's alignment with Europe in the post-September 11th security setting, as well as in the context of dual enlargement of NATO and the European Union. The article follows a neo-realist approach to-

¹ Bowker, M., "The place of Europe in Russian Foreign Policy", in Webber, M., ed., *Russia and Europe*, Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000, p. 22-45.

² "Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia", *Official Journal of the European Communities*, June 24, 15 03 2003. 1999, L157/1, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ceeca/com_strat/russia_99.pdf;

³ "The Russian Federation Middle Term Strategy Towards the European Union (2000-2010)", <http://www.eur.ru/neweur/user.php?func=index>; 12 04 2003.

ward analyzed events and processes. The author supports the mindset prevailing among Western, as well as Russian political analysts, that although today we are witnessing the replacement of a traditional external balance of power between independent polities by an internal institutional balance of influences, the essential features of international politics remain unchanged⁴. The shifting to substantial minimization of a probable mass-scale armed confrontation and the increasing all-around interdependence and harmonization of states' interests do not put an end to interstate rivalry but only alter its forms. Therefore, despite the shortcomings of neo-realism, it has been labeled as "the most prominent contemporary version of *realpolitik*"⁵. The latter remains particularly relevant to Russia's politics, where geopolitical rather than economic-cooperative factors are prevailing.

In this article the author upholds the view that Russia's foreign policy is essentially President Vladimir Putin's policy. This provision is supported by two arguments. First, it could be noted that the influence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in policy making, as compared with its previous eminence under Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov during the Yeltsin rule, has sharply declined. Instead of being an important political figure, today Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (like his predecessor Igor Ivanov) only a tool⁶. Second, Putin is obviously far ahead of other players in the Russian political and security community; he is the author and the main actor⁷. Although other players, especially security institutions, do have different roles of varying importance, President Putin is the person who makes things happen - or not - and possesses a permanent view of direction and policy⁸.

The paper is designed to outline key trends of Russia's European policy and provide an outlook on its future developments. The article embraces the following issues: first, it starts with a brief overview of Russian-European relations during the post-Cold War period; second, it looks at Russia's changing perceptions of NATO and the EU; third, it explores the ongoing Russia-EU dialogue including the security field; fourth, it outlines the main impediments that hinder Russia's engagement with Europe; fifth, it analyses Russia's balancing efforts between the United States and Europe in the wake of September 11; and finally, it provides conclusions on the prospects for Russia's further alignment with Euro-Atlantic community.

⁴ Straus, I. L., "Unipolarity: The Concentric Structure of the New World Order and the Position of Russia", *Kosmopolis Almanac*, Moscow, 1997, p. 158-159.

⁵ Pursiainen, C., *Russian Foreign Policy and International Relations Theory*, Aldershot (UK): Ashgate, 2000, p. 101.

⁶ Until now Russia's Foreign Ministry has remained largely unreformed, which explains why President Putin has relied on outside advisors. Putin says that the current Russian diplomatic corps is unequipped to understand free markets, free media, or the nature of post-Cold War threats. See Stent, A., "The New Russian Diplomacy", *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2002.

⁷ Fedorov, A., "Russia's Place in the World: Finally Emerging from the Effects of the Cold War", Presentation at the Wilton Park Conference WP 668 'Putin's Russia: Two Years on', UK, 11-15 March 2002.

⁸ Lo, B., "The Securitization of Russian Foreign Policy under Putin", in Gorodetsky, G., ed., *Russia between East and West: Russian Foreign Policy on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*, Frank Cass, 2003, p. 21.

1. Overview of Russian-European relations during the post-Cold War era

It is worth recalling that post-Soviet Russia appeared on the international scene with a strong pro-Western orientation. Destroying the old regime, getting rid of the communist past, and proclaiming itself firmly in favor of democracy and market economy – all this was considered to provide Russia a “green card” to the Western community. Thus Russia was both politically and psychologically ready to join the “community of the civilized nations” and to be recognized as a fully-fledged participant of the emerging new security order that was to replace the bipolar structure of the continent⁹. Such hopes, however, did not last long. Some observers tend to attribute this simply to Russia’s post-Cold War euphoria, other (and this seems more reasonable) - to the mishandling of emergent issues by various international players, first of all, by Russia itself.

One thing is obvious: in many respects Russia feels less at ease with Europe today than it did ten years ago. This is largely to do with two key factors. The first one is ideological or value-based and reflects Russia’s compatibility to Europe. If Russia wants to act as a “normal” member of the international community, the quality of standard Western values – democracy, human rights, market economy, and so on – becomes a critical test. Serious difficulties that the country experiences in this respect represent first of all a challenge for Russia itself, but also for its engagement with Europe. The second factor places geopolitics in the foreground and deals with Moscow’s reduced ability to affect developments in Europe. According to one neo-realist theory, shared by many political experts, Russia’s “departure” from Europe is attributed to its badly perceived and inadequately implemented foreign policy, dating back to the Soviet *perestroika*. From this perspective, the unjustified concessions arising from a series of Moscow’s interactions with Europe and the West as a whole – unification of Germany, dissolution of the “outer” empire, withdrawal of the Soviet Army from the Central Europe, and so forth – are regarded as powerful bargaining chips that could have been traded for significant compensations to Moscow, but instead were simply given away¹⁰.

As a result, with the end of the Cold War, Russia found itself pushed to the periphery of the continent. The former country’s neighborhood was separated from Russia by two territorial belts: the former Western republics of the Soviet Union and the former Warsaw Pact states. What is more, a number of factors traditionally affecting the country’s security status, such as access to the high seas, availability of critical resources and so on, have significantly deteriorated with the disintegration of the USSR. Russia has also lost some important tools that were available to the former Soviet Union in terms of exercising influence on Europe. Suffice it to mention the redeployment of significant armed forces 1,000 miles eastwards, in the context of troop withdrawals from Central Europe. Looking at military developments in a bro-

⁹ Baranovsky, V., “Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?”, in Brown, A., ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 433.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

ader sense, it is obvious that Russia's overall military might in Europe diminished dramatically during the 1990s. This is explained by two factors: first and foremost, the collapse of the USSR; second, the unprecedented economic decline followed by the 1998 financial meltdown, which made the appropriate allocation of defense resources impossible. In conventional terms, Russia's military forces became reduced to that of just a large European nation, which is nothing to compare with the former Soviet capabilities. Similar trends were apparent on the level of strategic nuclear weapons: while in the nineties still possessing numerical parity with the United States, it was unlikely that Russia would be able to maintain it in the coming decades. Beyond this, Russian forces were considerably weakened by the mass obsolescence of weapons and equipment, the severe curbing of procurement programs, let alone the crisis in morale within the officer corps coupled with a perceived loss of status, which has led to a wider malaise throughout all levels of the military.

The basic acceptance of new realities by Russians at the same time was colored by a certain bitterness, since retreat from Europe looked like "a panicked flight rather than a result of a deliberate policy"¹¹. Russia started to regard itself as a victim of unfair treatment by other international players, who have taken advantage of its poor domestic situation. Furthermore, Moscow found itself in the painful position of having lost all its old allies in Europe and being unable to attract any new ones, except Belarus, all reservations with respect to Lukashenko's regime notwithstanding. Russia has been suffering the impact of economic globalization but without the global influence it could previously extend.

This "no allies" situation had another consequence: it drew Russia away from Europe, both geopolitically and ideologically. If allies are not available in Europe, they should be sought outside it; if Europeans are unable or unwilling to accept Russia as a specific country, there may be other less intrusive interlocutors. The most significant example of how logic is translated into policy is Russian-Chinese rapprochement. Although Russia's connection with "rogue states" should not be exaggerated, some of them may be predictably regarded as potential candidates for partnership "by default", simply because alternative options, particularly in Europe, did not look available.

Another source of thinking along these lines was the significant advance in European integration in terms of dual – NATO and the EU – enlargement during the 1990s, while all of Russia's efforts towards integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have dramatically failed. Moreover, while the European states appeared to become closer to one another, Russia was in danger of losing its own territorial integrity. Above all, not only were Russia and the rest of Europe in different phases of their evolution, but also the continent's center of gravity was shifting westwards. In short, it is the geopolitical factor – the residual great power syndrome – that primarily affects Russia's relations with Europe. They are damaged by Russia's frustration and irritation and by its remaining wish to re-establish itself as a "special" player in Europe and the world.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Under Yeltsin, Moscow had undertaken considerable political and diplomatic activity to promote a “pan-European” security architecture. For this purpose the OSCE had been – in terms of its genesis, composition and operational mode – by far the most attractive multilateral institution for Russia. There were sporadic attempts to play on what are perceived as American-West European contradictions and to promote “pure European” approaches as a counterweight to excessive involvement of the Americans in the affairs of the continent. One of the side-effects of Kosovo has been increased Russian attention to Europe. Certainly, this was to a significant extent driven by an anti-NATO rationale. This was also true with respect to Russia’s emerging attitude towards security and military related developments within the EU.

According to Timofei Bordachev, researcher at the Carnegie Moscow Center, the policy of Russia in relation to the EU has passed through three stages. The first stage started at the beginning of the 1990s and culminated with the conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994¹². During that period the EU was living through the post-Maastricht period of emerging as a single player and partner of Russia. Due to the lack of expert resources to assess the EU’s nature, role and development trends, the Union was largely regarded favorably by Russia. The second stage (1996-1999) reflected the common tendency of Russia’s cold relations with the West. Finally, the third stage (after 1999), which is related to Putin’s era, is characterized by Russia’s resolute withdrawal from confrontational positions and the desire of the new Kremlin administration to use the policy of rapprochement with the West for obtaining maximum economic gains¹³.

Under Putin, Russia’s interest in economic links with Europe has considerably increased, due to the imperatives of domestic reforms and a desire to obtain better positions in the world market. Political interaction with Europe is essential if Russia is to achieve a respected international status. Russia’s primary interest with respect to Europe consists of making it instrumental in the country’s transformation. Moscow aims to consolidate Russia’s international role and prevent any developments that might marginalize it. Accordingly, Putin has largely abandoned Yeltsin’s idea of the OSCE as Europe’s premier security organization, and worked instead to rebuild relations with NATO after their suspension during the Kosovo crisis. It is his cold pragmatism which explains why under Putin, Russian foreign policy has escaped from the “radically alternating currents of optimism and disappointment” characteristic of the 1990s¹⁴.

¹² Although the PCA was agreed at Corfu European Council in 1994, its entry into force was delayed until the end of 1997 because EU concerns with the first war (1994-1996) in Chechnya. Author’s remark.

¹³ Bordachev, T. V., “Strategy and Strategies”, in Moshes, A., ed., *Rethinking the Respective Strategies of Russia and the European Union*, Carnegie Moscow Center & The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), 2003, p. 32 (Special FIIA – Carnegie Moscow Center Report).

¹⁴ Lo, B., *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking*, Palgrave, 2002, p. 161.

2. EU versus NATO

The buffer zone separating Russia from the West is shrinking fast. Already in the near future, Russia's only neighbor in the West will be the European Union and the EU-leaning Ukraine. In sharp contrast to the emotional reactions triggered in Russia by NATO's eastward expansion, Russia has not been particularly agitated at the prospect of the EU enlargement. Regarding this expansion, Russia has only made the headlines of Western newspapers in relation to the issue of Kaliningrad. Moscow's relatively relaxed attitude toward the enlargement of the European Union is partly attributable to the fact that it was only in the late 1990s when the EU emerged on the "radar screen" of the Russian political establishment as a foreign policy and security actor in its own right. Individual European states continue to be more important reference points for Russian foreign policy.

Another reason for Russia's fairly quiet approach towards EU enlargement is the lack of understanding of what European integration involves and what Euro-Atlantic integration actually means for Russia. Until 2000, the predominant perception on the Russian side had been that the expansion of the EU was essentially a positive development, providing important and essential momentum for Russia's own ambitious modernization project and driven by economic rather than political imperatives¹⁵. It is indicative that Russia's attitude towards the European Union has always been very different from that towards NATO. As Dmitri Trenin, Deputy Director of Carnegie Moscow Centre, points out, Russians tend "to contrast good West of Europe/EU" with the "bad West of America/NATO"¹⁶. When treating the European Union as a benign organization, Russia liked about it "not the things that the EU had (...) but rather the things the EU lacked"¹⁷, namely, the American presence and an integrated military organization.

Apart from the Union's real progress toward the goal of a substantial expansion to the East, the second reason for a growing interest in Russia lies in the internal reforms carried out within the EU in the 1990s. These resulted in the organisation's transformation and efforts to raise its international profile, for example by embarking on a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) within the overall framework of the emerging Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It should be stressed that the ESDP appeared at first to offer an alternative for Russia: a more acceptable European security system aimed at weakening or even eroding the NATO Alliance. Therefore, Russian policy makers saw the ESDP as a means of driving a wedge between the European members of NATO and the U.S.¹⁸. Also because the military dimension still plays only a minor role in the EU, Russia has never had the impression that the enlargement of the EU would pose a threat to Russia.

¹⁵ Baranovsky V., "Russia's Attitudes Towards the EU: Political Aspects", Programme on the Northern Dimension of the CFSP, No. 13, Helsinki and Berlin: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs and Institut für Europäische Politik, 2001, p. 122-143.

¹⁶ Trenin D., "Russia-EU partnership: Grand Vision and Practical Steps", *Russia on Russia*, Issue 1, Moscow School of Political Studies and Social Market Foundation, February 2000, p. 106.

¹⁷ Trenin D., "Russian-Lithuanian Relations: Will the Success Story Last", *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 2000/2 (6), <http://www.urm.lt/lfpr>, 30 05 2003.

¹⁸ Light M., et al., "Russian Perspectives on European Security", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 2000, p. 12-14.

The reality proved to be different. Suffice it to take the Kaliningrad issue, which made the Russians very aware that the EU enlargement is actually a much wider-ranging and more ambitious project than NATO's eastward expansion. Russia had to discover that, in Trenin's words, "whereas NATO was geared to contingencies, the EU operated on a routine day-to-day basis"¹⁹. The terms of trade are undergoing a substantial change, the same happened with the movements of people across the new EU boundaries. The true barriers are likely to be erected between "ins" and "outs", let alone the impact of a "Schengen curtain" on the broader access of Russian exports to the EU markets. And how will Moscow and Brussels manage the status of Kaliningrad, eventually encircled by the EU territory, the so-called "pilot project" or "litmus test" of the Russian-EU relationship? Thus, the EU enlargement is having the double effect of making Europe both closer to Russia geographically and more distant in terms of the widening economic and social gap. Under these conditions, Russia faces the prospect of progressive marginalisation²⁰. Membership in the EU may be less difficult to imagine than that of NATO, but Russia's sheer size would threaten to destabilize EU structures and institutions, even supposing that Moscow is capable of meeting the membership criteria²¹. However, although the former dichotomy between a "bad" NATO and "good" EU is no longer so unconditional as a result of the latter's enlargement and its implications for Kaliningrad²², the Alliance's image is still predominantly a negative one.

3. Russia-EU dialogue

Russia is an important neighbor for the European Union, and the latter has shown considerable commitment towards engaging Russia, to help in its transformation and to bring it closer to the EU. Correspondingly, the Union is Russia's most important trading partner, an immense source of investment and know-how, a useful broker in helping Russia gain WTO membership and the only real political alternative to U.S. hegemony. The overall objective of the EU policy *vis-à-vis* Russia is deep internal transformation of this country on the basis of gradual acceptance of a complex of European norms and values. In 1997 the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement²³ (PCA), the main legal document underlying relations between the EU and Russia, came into force. In 1999 the EU Common Strategy on Russia²⁴ (CSR) was added, to which Russia responded with the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS); and in

¹⁹ Trenin, (note 17).

²⁰ Trenin, (note 16).

²¹ Bowker, (note 1) p. 40.

²² Kasyanov, M., "PM rejects EU visa proposal for Kaliningrad", *The Russia Journal* (online edition), 27 September 2002, <http://www.russiajournal.com/news-article.shtml?nd=27419>.

²³ "Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between EU and Russia", http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/russia/pca_legal.

²⁴ The CSR, adopted by the EU in Cologne in 1999, was the first such strategy decided under the CFSP in the Amsterdam Treaty. Author's remark.

2000 the Northern Dimension²⁵ (ND) Action Plan was approved. Despite this, the EU-Russia relationship still lacks substance, since most of the politically correct declarations and initiatives have not been translated into practice (see “Impediments in Russia’s engagement with Europe”).

Europe’s interest in co-operation with Russia is based largely on geostrategic pragmatism, since they share the continent. To put it plainly, Russia is an “inescapable presence on Europe’s security horizon”²⁶. It poses both positive and negative challenges to Europe. From the positive side, Russia matters for the EU as a source of energy, representing over 15% of fuel provisions²⁷. Russia is also likely to become a more important source of energy for the European Union in the coming years. It is noteworthy that the main goal of Russia-EU energy dialogue is to enhance the energy security on the European continent²⁸. One could also argue that since the end of the Cold War, Russia has been providing an added value to European diplomacy. Even if Moscow’s role here is quite passive, (e.g. in the “Quartet” – Russia, US, EU, UN), it is nevertheless important largely because it contributes to the “image of international consensus”²⁹ on a particular question. Russia is equally a source of negative challenges. Of particular concern are soft security threats emanating from the post-Soviet space: nuclear safety, organised crime, drug trafficking, illegal immigration, money laundering, trafficking in women and children, the spread of infectious diseases (especially tuberculosis and HIV-AIDS), and environmental pollution.

Russia’s aim is to become an integral part of Europe – not to become a member of the European community or to merge with it, but to be in Europe, just as much as Germany or France is in Europe. Russia does not seek membership in NATO or the European Union, but rather the greatest potential advantages of the closest possible association with them. Moscow wishes to pursue multi-sided cooperation with the EU and seeks to raise such co-operation to the level of strategic partnership. In his message to the Russian Federation’s Federal Meeting in 2001, President Putin noted the growing significance of Russia’s efforts to become an effective partner with the EU and emphasized that “Russia’s course toward the integration with Europe will become one of the key areas of Russian foreign policy”³⁰.

According to the former Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, one of the fundamental tenets of Russia’s European policy is the expansion of bilateral relations with individual countries³¹. Russia views bilateralism instrumentally, as a conduit for advancing Russia’s interests inside the EU and NATO. Bilateral co-operation is

²⁵ The concept of Northern Dimension Initiative is introduced by Finland. The rationale is to create a forum for co-operation between the EU, its direct neighbour Russia and other states in the Baltic Sea region with the aim at enhancing regional security and stability. Author’s remark.

²⁶ Stent A., Shevtsova L., “America, Russia and Europe: a Realignment”, *Survival*, 44 (4), Winter 2002-03, p. 127.

²⁷ Lynch, D., “Russia faces Europe”, *Chailot Papers*, No 60, May 3003, p. 19

²⁸ For information on the EU-Russia energy dialogue, see http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/energy_transport/en/lpi_en_3.html, 05 12 2002.

²⁹ Lynch, (note 27) p.19.

³⁰ Putin quoted in Ivanov, S. I., *The New Russian Diplomacy*, Washington, D.C: The Nixon Center and Brookings Institution Press, 2002, p. 96.

³¹ *Ibid.*

also considered important in its own right, especially for the trade and economic benefits it may provide. Therefore the institutional and bilateral trends are joined in Russian policy, each having specific significance in itself and wider importance in influencing the other. Here, the overriding point is that for all the twists and turns of Europe's turbulent history, bilateral ties have always been a positive stabilizing factor in international relations in Europe³². Another reason for this state of affairs is that the policy of the power game or concept of neo-realism has not yet been abandoned both in the Russian theory of international relations and in foreign policy. On the basis of such principles throughout the decade, Russia regarded the EU as a regional interstate association in which the supranational element does not play an essential role, and all basic decisions are taken by the European powers independently³³. There are parallels with today. For example, Putin drew on close bilateral (personal) ties to reinforce and exploit differences between EU institutions in the final stages of negotiations with Brussels to find a solution to Kaliningrad transit in 2002.

Russia has had, for historical reasons, important connections to certain European states. Although the U.S. has remained the central state for Russia, the establishment of relations with European "heavyweights" is crucial for Russia's attempt to promote a "pan-European" security architecture. Russia's desire to use ties with the European states and organizations as leverage over the United States is driven by anxiety over future U.S. policy. By the end of the Yeltsin presidency, France and Germany were considered to be Russia's major partners on the European scene; Vladimir Putin has "upgraded" the United Kingdom to this status. Each of the three are attractive for Russia in its own way. Whereas Russian-British ties are important for their "trans-Atlantic resonance", Moscow values relations with Paris for the similarity in their approaches towards international relations³⁴. While the UK and France are important, Germany unquestionably occupies a primary place in Russia's European policy.

Post-Soviet Russia has always regarded Germany as its key partner in Europe. More precisely, Germany is a symbol of Europe for Russia. Putin's rise to power has seen an attempt to raise the Russo-German relationship to a new level. His affiliation with Germany is explicable by personal reasons: he spent a significant part of his KGB career in the GDR, therefore he knows the country and German language. It is Russia's wish to develop a special relationship with Germany as a key part of its own objective of developing a strategic partnership with the EU. During his visit to Germany in April 2002, Putin is quoted as saying that "it is impossible to view the relations between Russia and Germany now beyond the context of Moscow's relations with the European Union. Germany is one of the centuries of European integration"³⁵.

³² *Ibid*, p. 95.

³³ Bordachev, (note 13) p. 36.

³⁴ Lynch, (note 27) p. 50.

³⁵ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), SU/4485, 11 April 2002.

To summarize, Russia's rapprochement with Europe follows two directions - a strengthening of its partnership with the European Union and stepping up of bilateral relations with the EU members. Recent experience (e.g. the issue of travelling to Kaliningrad via Lithuania) demonstrated that Russia was able to find effective counterbalancing mechanisms at the bilateral level if problems developed in its relations with the EU. It should also be stressed that along with the renewed emphasis on Putin's perception of Russia as an integral part of Europe, there was a desire to see a Europe that was less "Atlanticist"³⁶. One could argue that the Kremlin's end-game, albeit remote, is EU-based security mechanisms - the ESDP and the Rapid Reaction Force to counterbalance NATO-based structures within European security architecture³⁷. Only then, the logic runs, would Russia be guaranteed against the further deterioration of its geopolitical standing in Europe and beyond.

4. Security relations

The European approach to Russia's security question has been basically indirect: to assist the country's difficult transformation process with the hope that at some point in time this will also yield security benefits. The actual security agenda between Russia and the EU is fairly modest, especially in the "hard" security area. In the purely military field, Europe's direct engagement with Russia remains very limited due to the fact that Russia remains a problematic security partner. Moscow is still involved in the muddle of the Chechen war, and its current defence policy seems largely untenable, with many challenges to sustain, let alone modernize, military capabilities. Russia's record in civil military relations is another sensitive topic.

Putin's turn to the European Union was part of his recognition that the EU offers an opportunity not only in terms of economics and trade, but also in terms of European security. Albeit at first taking a "wait-and-see"³⁸ approach towards the ESDP, at the same time Moscow could not ignore the fact that the latter was emerging concurrently with the deepening and widening of the EU. If Russia seeks to maximize its opportunities for influencing ESDP developments, it has to establish extensive links with all major organizations active in European security.

In Igor Ivanov's words, the main goal of Russia's European policy is to work toward a "stable, non-discriminatory, and universal system for European security"³⁹. This is what it would take to build a "Greater Europe" with a unified area of stability and security, economic prosperity and permanent democracy⁴⁰. In this sense, the ESDP is essentially an instrument to create a "Greater Europe". In other words, relations with the ESDP should advance Russian interests in Europe, which consist

³⁶ This implies that Russia wants less U.S. influence in Europe. See Smith M. A., "Contemporary Russian Perceptions of Euro-Atlanticism", F74, RMA Sandhurst (UK): Conflict Studies Research Centre (CSRC), February 2002.

³⁷ See Igor Ivanov's comments to the press following discussions with the EU in Madrid: *Diplomaticheskiy Vestnik*, No. 5, May 2002, p. 21 (in Russian).

³⁸ Lynch, (note 27) p. 73.

³⁹ Ivanov, (note 30) p. 96.

⁴⁰ V. Putin quoted in Ivanov, *ibid.*

in creating a model of European security that ensures Moscow an “equal” voice in all security dimensions. Moscow’s perception of the ESDP as such is in complete contrast to that of Brussels. For the EU, the ESDP is just a limited instrument of the Union’s foreign policy, dealing solely with crises management, thus it “serves the EU and not a „Greater Europe“⁴¹.

For a decade, Russia’s interest in the development of a “pan-European” security architecture was accompanied by its efforts in trying to elevate the OSCE status as Europe’s umbrella security organization to which all other institutions are subordinate. Yeltsin even sought to tie the development of the EU as a security actor to the strengthening of the OSCE⁴². Such a policy line was not extinct in the first half of Putin’s tenure. Suffice it to mention his call, repeated on many occasions prior to September 11, for a reordering of the strategic and security relationships between Russia, Europe, and the U.S, saying that the current security system does not ensure security at all. On the other hand, Putin’s pragmatic, yet geopolitically driven approach to international affairs is well illustrated by Moscow’s management of relations with European institutions like the OSCE, NATO and the EU.

Later on, Putin gradually abandoned the idea of the primacy of the OSCE, relegating it to the margins of European security thinking. This carries two explanations. First of all, the OSCE has increasingly become seen as cumbersome and intrusive (notably vis-à-vis Chechnya), and incapable of serving as an effective instrument in promoting Russia’s strategic goals – this was, in Moscow’s view, confirmed by the OSCE Istanbul summit in 2001⁴³. Accordingly, Russia’s perception towards the ESDP has changed. Under Yeltsin, the ESDP (and the EU) was looked upon as a counterweight to a “NATO-centric” European security system and as a key “pole” in a multi-polar world order. The Putin administration has been keen to establish cooperation in the ESDP area but in a different way. In the Kremlin’s view the ESDP assumes a different function: that of “a new channel” for Russia’s inclusion in European policy-making processes⁴⁴. From this perspective the emergence of the ESDP in the European security landscape requires Russia to develop bilateral contacts with a new structure as soon as possible. Secondly, Moscow started to resume its relations with NATO, which were ceased in protest over NATO’s air campaign in Kosovo. It was the invitation of Putin, then only acting President, in the beginning of 2000, to NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson, which provided the initial impulsion for moves in this direction. Already at this time Putin acknowledged the inescapable fact that NATO is the dominant security reality in Europe, and that Russia is left with no choice but to adapt accordingly. Such a policy shift was essentially a decision not to move against developments over which Moscow had little leverage.

The Russian President had to acknowledge that NATO continues to have a considerable influence both inside Europe and beyond its borders. In December 2001, Putin stated that “(...) a change in the quality of Russian relations with NATO

⁴¹ Lynch, (note 27) p. 76.

⁴² Press 43, Nr 618/99, *EU-Russia Summit*, Brussels, 18 02 1999.

⁴³ “Moskva protiv provedeniya sammita OBSE v etom godu” [Moscow against holding the OSCE summit this year], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 31 March 2001, p. 1 (in Russian).

⁴⁴ Rontoyanni, C., “So far, so good? Russia and the ESDP”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4, 2002, p. 818.

could be a good bridge to the participation of Russia in the future system of European security⁴⁵. Relations with NATO, therefore, have an instrumental value for Moscow in creating a more predictable climate in Europe. The declaration *NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality*⁴⁶, adopted by the heads of NATO member states and the Russian Federation in Rome in May 2002, seemed to mark a significant move towards changing the nature of the Alliance, and thus transforming the structure of European and even global security systems. Russia expected its status in the management of security in the Euro-Atlantic area would be elevated, thereby allowing the possibility for Russia to overcome the largely marginal role it played in European security management in the 1990s. Chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, Sergey Karaganov, went even further, arguing that Russia should be interested in NATO as a means by which European powers, including Russia, could constrain U.S. unilateralism⁴⁷.

The key to a more effective security partnership is supposed to be the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). The political will to make this new body work is a key difference from the situation in the 1990s. Then Moscow set out to constrain NATO, but now Putin realizes that such a posture will only lead to Russia's continued isolation. The mistakes that doomed the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) can be avoided if the new Council concentrates on modest joint projects to build trust for the development of larger ones. The NRC should, among other things, focus on a needed military reform in Russia, enabling the Russian military to interact more effectively with its NATO counterparts and encourage a new security thinking in Europe. However, in Russia, NATO is far from being seen in benevolent positive-sum terms, as it remains primarily a military bloc. This explains why, despite Putin's more cooperative and pragmatic attitude toward NATO, the Russian military remains skeptical, even hostile, towards the Alliance.

It remains to be seen the real outcome of NATO-Russia rapprochement, but at present, according to many commentators, the NRC seems to give Moscow relatively little new on substance. The key point is that opinions within NATO and in Russia with regard to a new format of co-operation are not in harmony. In the short and medium term, NATO's priority vis-à-vis Russia is to promote more military-to-military contacts, in particular to engage the Russian military in meaningful discussions on Russian defense reform. Russia's wish-list for future co-operation with NATO includes more practical interaction on operational aspects of peacekeeping, as well as making the NRC a platform for discussing and reaching common understanding on key global security issues⁴⁸. Moscow has hoped for some real progress towards transforming NATO from a defensive alliance into a political body dealing with security throughout a wider Europe. Moreover, as it was noted, Russia itself has been

⁴⁵ See Putin's speech to Greek media, Daily News Briefs (DNB), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Moscow, 5 December 2001.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/b020528e.htm>, 10 03 2003

⁴⁷ Interview with Karaganov, S. "We need to have a normal alliance with the countries of the West", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 February 2002.

⁴⁸ *Strategic Survey: Evaluation and Forecast of World Affairs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 118.

promoting NATO's development into a political organization, equal to those existing in Europe (EU, OSCE, etc.), without giving NATO a monopoly⁴⁹. The main challenge for Russia, provoking much resistance from NATO's side, is that it appears to want to integrate on security issues but has no interest in military integration⁵⁰. Following this logic, NATO-Russia co-operation is essentially not developing in the Alliance's main sphere of activity – the military, including the military aspects of fighting international terrorism⁵¹. The Russian military establishment is manifesting extreme restraint in this regard.

In general terms, the most important achievement of the NRC has been that Russia and NATO have established a consensus building culture and are acquiring invaluable experience in joint decision making. Testifying to a new commitment to co-operation, the work of the NRC has not been affected by the divisions within the Alliance over military planning assistance to Turkey in anticipation of the war in Iraq. Certainly, the NRC continued to work even after the launch of the U.S. military campaign in Iraq. On the one hand, this continuity stood in sharp contrast to the Kosovo war, during which joint NATO-Russia activities were suspended. On the other hand, this “normality” should also be read as proof that the NRC is not seen either by Russia or NATO as central to their security needs.

Trenin argues that there are “options for security co-operation leading to security integration”⁵² between Russia and Western Europe. One is NATO, which will remain the key Western security arrangement for the foreseeable future. Collaboration on the new security agenda, ranging from fighting international terrorism, to dealing with proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to peacekeeping, will serve the main purpose of “demilitarizing the Russian–Western relationship”⁵³. This, in turn, creates the conditions and provides the incentives for military reform, based on current and future threats and risks, rather than on those of the past. The second option is Russia's security relationship with the European Union, which should cover the areas in which the EU is the most competent – soft security issues. These are particularly relevant to contemporary Europe and comprise various kinds of security – from environmental and NBC security (nuclear waste disposal, chemical disarmament, etc.) to the Petersberg (or ESDP) tasks⁵⁴. The Kaliningrad enclave which is perceived as a test of EU-Russian co-operation, including the security sphere, is a case in point. Kaliningrad also calls for a measure of EU-NATO-Russia co-ordination. Another example for such trilateral co-operation could be the Balkans⁵⁵, and

⁴⁹ Antonenko, O., “NATO Enlargement and Russia: A Declining Problem?”, Presentation at the Wilton Park Conference WP 668 “Putin's Russia: Two Years on”, UK, 11-15 March 2002.

⁵⁰ Gorenburg, D., et al, “The Expansion of NATO into the Baltic Sea Region: Prague 2002 and Beyond”, The Center for Strategic Studies, U.S.: Alexandria, Virginia, May 2002, p. 38, 40.

⁵¹ As of 2003, military cooperation focused on a limited number of areas such as logistics, air transport, air-to-air refueling, and maritime search and rescue. See *strategic Survey*, (note 48) p. 118.

⁵² Trenin, D., “A Russia within Europe: Working Towards a New Security Arrangement”, *Russia's Security Policy & EU-Russian Relations*, ESF Working Paper No. 6, March 2002, p. 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

perhaps Central Asia and the South Caucasus⁵⁶. In the view of Dmitry Danilov, the Head of the Department of European Security of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian and EU forces could jointly participate in crisis management operations in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). He argues that it would be beneficial for both parties as it would strengthen the role of the EU as a regional and international player, and Russia's influence in the FSU countries⁵⁷. Yet for the time being this idea seems to be premature as Russia is concerned that the ESDP might be turned against its interests in future with forces deployed on its borders⁵⁸.

The possibility of Russia and EU military structures participating in crisis management operations was first mentioned at the Russia-EU summit in Paris on 30 October 2000, when the *Joint Declaration on Strengthening Dialogue and Cooperation on Political and Security Matters in Europe*⁵⁹ was adopted. The May 2002 summit indicated that the Russia-EU security relationship has become more substantive since 2000. In the Joint Statement issued at the summit, Russia and the EU agreed to deepen their "political dialogue and co-operation in crisis management and security matters"⁶⁰. Beyond this, the Russian Federation has come up with a Russia-EU Action Plan in the ESDP field⁶¹. That same year, the EU military staff also included a Russian liaison officer. Thus, in 2002-2003 Russia's relations with the EU in the areas of security and defense progressed, although, as with NATO, still very little, starting with the conceptual approach, has been achieved here, and the current institutional mechanisms linking the EU and Russia are insufficient to sustain a productive dialogue in this area⁶². But it remains politically significant that after several years of Russian skepticism and apathy towards the ESDP, Moscow has finally manifested its intent to co-operate.

It should be stressed that the idea of joint Russia-EU participation in crisis management operations is very realistic and became more vital after September 11, which accelerated U.S. military withdrawal from such activities in Europe. Since 2000, Russia has been reducing its contribution to NATO-led operations in the Balkans, but simultaneously it has sought to participate in new EU operations in the region, partly because of a desire to retain influence, however symbolic, in all aspects of European security. It is noteworthy that Russia participated in the first operation of the EU - EU Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although there are disagreements over the modalities for Russia's, as a third party, involvement in the ESDP operations, it is likely that Russia-EU security dialogue will intensify⁶³. The

⁵⁶ Zagorski, A., "Russia and NATO: Prospects for Cooperation after the Prague Summit", *LAIR Policy Papers*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 2002, p.9.

⁵⁷ Danilov D., "How stable are our priorities", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11 March 2002.

⁵⁸ Lynch, (note 27) p. 77.

⁵⁹ Website for documents of the October 2000 EU-Russia summit, Paris, 30/10/2001, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/russia/summit_30_10_00/stat_secu_en.htm.

⁶⁰ European Commission Russia website for documents of the May 2002 Russia-EU summit: http://www.eur.ru/eng/neweur/user_eng.php?func=delspec&id=98, 12 12 2002.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Lynch, (note 27) p. 90.

⁶³ As of April 2003, EU-Russia co-operation covered four areas: conflict prevention, landmine clearance; possible use by the EU of Russian-Ukrainian log-haul air transportation; and Russia participation in the EUPM. See *Strategic Survey*, (note 48), p. 119.

predominant idea for the co-operation in the future should be not to create a common European “security space” or some version of Gorbachev’s “common European home”. The focus should fall on specific security questions that are urgent to both Russia and the EU.

5. Impediments to Russia’s engagement with Europe

EU-Russian relations are progressing, but there is a considerable wariness on both sides. The elaborate framework of processes is too wide and insufficiently focused. Russian officials have been frustrated by the institutional complexities of dealing with Brussels bureaucracy and by the EU’s lack of flexibility. EU officials are also cautious in their dealings with Moscow and react negatively to Russian attempts to bend the rules.

Despite the stated objective of developing a political dialogue, the PCA framework highlights the deeply technical nature of the Russia-EU relationship, which is overwhelmingly concerned with trade and economic issues. According to the PCA, the structure of the dialogue is “more function of internal requirements of the EU than those of the relationship itself”⁶⁴. For instance, the six-monthly summits are determined by the rotating EU presidency and not by the need for continual high-level dialogue. The CSR has also a limited value, as it remains underpinned by the PCA, and no additional resources are dedicated to the development of relations with Russia. Furthermore, the comparison of the two framework documents – the European CSR and the Russian MTS – reflects a big discrepancy between their definitions of the scope of partnership. First of all, the CSR contains broad and vague provisions, while the MTS is very specific. Secondly, the two strategies highlight diverging concerns of the parties – a strategic gap separating Moscow and Brussels. The EU focuses on values and the necessity of Russia’s democratic reforms and building civil society, while Russia addresses its national interests and preserving the fundamental principle of sovereign rights⁶⁵. Finally, the Russian MTS views the EU as an instrument for developing a “pan-European” security system in accordance with the Primakovian line of multipolarity. As the security agendas of Russia and the EU are radically different, political and security dialogue has failed to progress. Another point must also be taken in to account – whereas the EU operates through institutions, Russia is governed by personalities. These differences have rendered the development of a “strategic partnership” between Moscow and Brussels difficult⁶⁶. The bottom line is that the two parties have different views on their partnership, its scope and commitment it entails.

That said, the EU faces the challenge of seizing an opportunity in engaging Russia more effectively. Russia remains a prickly partner for Europe, “sometimes confused and confusing, certainly always defensive”⁶⁷. The issue is not *whether* Rus-

⁶⁴ Lynch, (note 27) p. 55.

⁶⁵ See note 2 and 3.

⁶⁶ The phrase “strategic partnership” is used in the EU agreement without any single interpretation as applied to Russia clearly being offered. This is supposed to mean different things for each party. Author’s remark.

⁶⁷ Lynch, (note 27) p. 18.

sia will become involved in the processes of European integration, but *how* this can be brought about. Put another way, the main focus is how the relationship between the EU and Russia is developing against the backdrop of EU enlargement. The question of whether the EU can be enlarged without drawing new boundaries, without forcing Russia and the other European states into a peripheral position, is certainly one of the most important challenges facing the continent today. It must be remembered that Russia and the EU are caught up in their own transformation projects - the EU toward deepening and widening and Russia toward state consolidation and economic revitalization. The different priorities of Russia and the EU dilute any urgency either party may feel in making significant efforts with the other.

The widening and simultaneous deepening of the European Union represents a major challenge for relations between the EU and Russia. Significantly, Russia-EU economic co-operation appears to have reached its limit. In 2002, both sides were engaged in active dialogue on the development of a concept of "common economic space", but it is facing a lot of impediments when it comes to its implementation. This suggests that the real cost of enlargement has not been properly understood in either Russia or the EU⁶⁸. Whatever have been the failings of Europe, a considerable part of the problem in the EU-Russia relationship should be placed at Russia's doorstep. The central issue here has to do with the domestic reform challenge for Russia, particularly in three areas - security, border regimes, trade and economic relations. The EU enlargement in 2004 has created new tensions between the EU and Russia, especially over the future of the Kaliningrad *oblast*. This issue was put on the European and international agenda suddenly and at a surprisingly late point of time. The problem existed throughout the nineties, but the perception of a problem did not. The debate over Kaliningrad has caused the EU and Russia to focus more heavily on the issue of their bilateral relations. Kaliningrad has repeatedly been subject to serve as a "litmus-test" of current Russian-EU relations. During 2002, the Russian government opposed EU proposals for even a relaxed permit regime for travelling to and from the Kaliningrad exclave on the ground that this would infringe the basic rights of Russian citizens to move freely within their own country, and thereby violate Russian sovereignty itself⁶⁹. The matter was only resolved - for the time being - at the EU-Russia summit in November 2002, when Putin agreed reluctantly to a system of Facilitated Transit Documents, for Russians, travelling via Lithuania to/from the exclave⁷⁰.

Notwithstanding the raised profile of economic priorities, it is important to bear in mind that most of the big Russian foreign policy issues continue to be security and geopolitics. According to Bobo Lo, Associate Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House, the pursuit of purely economic priorities gains momentum from the so-called "conjunctural factors" - political and strategic development⁷¹. Accordingly, Moscow's heightened interest in relations with the EU

⁶⁸ *Strategic Survey 2001/2002*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 149.

⁶⁹ Kasyanov, (note 22).

⁷⁰ "Joint Statement of the European Union and the Russian Federation on Transit between the Kaliningrad Region and the Rest of the Russian Federation", Brussels, 11 November 2002.

⁷¹ Lo, B., *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, London, RIIA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 70 (Chatham House Papers).

is only partially driven by economic considerations; the Putin administration continues to view the EU predominantly through a political prism. It is indicative of this mentality that the main agenda item in Russia-EU relationship has become visa-free access for residents of Kaliningrad and other Russian citizens transiting Lithuania, rather than an opening opportunity for Russia to benefit economically from the EU enlargement. Putin's tough stance on the Kaliningrad visa issue has often undermined its integrationist policy vis-à-vis Europe. This means that one could not have any illusions that Putin looks at economic priorities and interests in the same way as his Western European counterparts. On the one hand, it is inevitable that Russian thinking still remains influenced by the Soviet past, excluding certain notions that are integral to Western understanding, such as the interdependence between economic growth, democratisation and the development of civil society⁷². On the other hand, one could not underestimate the extent to which things have evolved under Putin. In contrast to the almost openly neglectful approach of the Yeltsin administration towards foreign economic policy, the Kremlin today demonstrates a completely different mentality and capacity to translate general intentions into practice.

By and large, the nature of Russia-EU partnership will be shaped by a few things. First of all, it is Russia's "ability to overcome stalled democratic transition" and begin the key challenge of the Putin era - "democratic consolidation"⁷³. Beside this, the war in Chechnya remains Russia's wild card. The dispute concerning the Kaliningrad problem could also have a fairly durable negative impact on Russia-EU relations. In a broader perspective, success or failure in Russia's rapprochement with Europe will primarily depend on the pace and depth of Russia's political, economic and societal transformation. EU concerns relate to a perceived incompatibility between the democratic and human rights principles underpinning the EU and Russia's ambiguous commitment to these values. Russia does not match the clear political correctness, bureaucratic pedantry, contentedness and overall liberalism of European life.

6. September 11 and after: Russia between the U.S. and Europe

The change of the Russian leadership's attitude towards the West started well before the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001. Vladimir Putin has drawn a few important conclusions from his predecessor's foreign policy course. First, he realised that the rules of the international post-Cold War order were written without Russia's involvement. Second, the pursuit of multi-polarity by the previous Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, Yevgeny Primakov, only marginalized Russia and left it stranded in a "no-man's land of international affairs"⁷⁴. In the words of Sergey Karaganov, Chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, Putin's foreign policy seeks to "enable Russia to get out of the no-man's land it found itself after the Cold War as semi-partner semi-enemy of the West"⁷⁵. Most importantly, the

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 71.

⁷³ Herd, G., P., "EU Enlargement in the North: Security Dynamics in Nordic-Baltic-EU-Russian Relations into the New Century", CSRC, F69, February 2000, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Lynch, (note 27) p. 10.

⁷⁵ Interview by Yelena Aleksandrovna in *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, 12 March 2002 (in Russian).

post-September 11th developments have clarified for Russia one of the main trends in the new era: “the world may be multi-polar but there is only one superpower”⁷⁶. Third, previous foreign policy was just a waste of energy and distraction from the primary task of revitalising the Russian state. Putin grasped the dangerous link between internal and external trends facing Russia, with “external isolation reinforcing internal weakness, undermining consensus on reform and strengthening radical political forces”⁷⁷. Fourth, he realised the importance of a predictable and “friendly” external environment. This objective required rethinking the order of priorities of foreign policy. The final conclusion was the need for pragmatism – the one that, according to Moscow’s definition, signifies maintaining foreign policy strictly in line with state capabilities⁷⁸.

Against this background, Putin’s policy course is founded on a dispassionate recognition of Russia’s weakness and a determination to concentrate on giving new vigour to the Russian state. This is seen to dictate a policy of international engagement. January 2001, Putin stated “(...) our strategic choice is for integration”⁷⁹. As a point of principle, the Kremlin has no alternative but to pursue integration: isolation would leave it on the sidelines of history and without influence over the developments that are important for Russia’s future. Moscow’s earlier endorsed “special way” could irreversibly make Russia a third world country⁸⁰. But one could make a clear distinction between Russia’s “pro-Western” choice and “pro-integrationist” one. In the view of Vyacheslav Nikonov, Politika Fund President in Moscow, Russia will not become the West, but there is no need for it to become anti-West⁸¹. It is also important to bear in mind that the “pragmatism” pursued by Putin is not based on compromise but on calculation. Put simply, Russia has to align itself to the main states and institutions of the Euro-Atlantic community⁸² in order to avoid isolation, increase Russia’s voice and promote international support for Russian reform. That said, September 11th was an accelerator, not a turning point – it only gave a major boost to already changing perceptions and Russia’s improved relationship with the West.

Since his advent to power, Putin has been described as a Euro-centrist; one of the characteristics distinguishing his foreign policy approach from that of Yeltsin. Accordingly, it became commonplace to consider Putin’s foreign policy more “European”. There are two good reasons for these claims. First, Putin’s Euro-centric approach is to do with his working experience in Europe: his background as a KGB officer in the former East Germany and as a Deputy Mayor of St Petersburg with responsibility for the city’s relations with the outside world. Second, during his first months in office, Putin’s visits to the major West European capitals highlighted the importance of closer Russian co-operation with the EU and were aimed at enlisting European support for Moscow’s positions on the international scene on strategic issues, such as curtailing American plans to proceed with national missile defence⁸³.

⁷⁶ Lynch, (note 27), p. 15.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ DNB, MFA, Moscow, 29 January 2001, <http://www.mid.ru>.

⁸⁰ According to A. Moshes, Discussion on contemporary Russian politics, Tartu: Baltic Defence College, 3 April 2002.

⁸¹ Nikonov, V., “Towards Russia’s National Revival”, *International Affairs* (Moscow), No. 4, 2001.

⁸² The notion of Euro-Atlantic community largely coincides with the Cold War notion of the West, stretching from the United States through Europe to Japan. Author’s remark.

⁸³ Lo, (note 8) p. 23.

In its foreign policy agenda, Moscow initially stressed its strategic relations with Europe, putting a reduced emphasis on the U.S., probably as a response to the Bush administration's initial downplaying of Russia. The Russian government has started to recognise the potentially powerful and independent role the EU is acquiring in world affairs. From this conclusion flows Russia's insistence on developing close ties. However, things have changed after September 11th; Russian policy started also to take a strong U.S.-focus. Since then official Moscow has been emphasising its strategic partnership with both the EU and the U.S. This is well in line with the Bush administration's approach to see Russia as an integral part of Europe co-operating with the United States. In his speech to the German Bundestag in May 2002, President Bush stated that one of the U.S. missions is "to encourage the Russian people to find their future in Europe, and with America. Russia has its best chance since 1917 to become a part of Europe's family"⁸⁴. On the other hand, Russia's pro-American orientation arguably reflects its shifting priorities shaped by the "calculus of international power politics" – and this presupposes a fundamentally "America-centric approach"⁸⁵.

As it was noted, Russian perceptions of the EU are "riddled with ambiguity"⁸⁶. The Kremlin considers that if Europe wants to be independent and a full-fledged global power centre, the shortest route to this goal is to have good relations with Russia. The Russians seem to have a dream: Europe plus Russia equals a mighty power. Putin's speech at the Bundestag in September 2002 carried a hint of this:

However, I simply think that (...) Europe will better consolidate its reputation as a powerful and really independent centre of international politics if it combines its own possibilities with Russia's human, territorial and natural resources, with Russia's economic, cultural and defence potential⁸⁷.

According to Stephan de Spiegelcire, from the Rand Corporation's Europe office, Russia's different approach to Europe and the U.S. could also be explained by the very fact that Europe and America are currently "pursuing different security agendas with respect to Russia, employing different policy instruments and through different institutions"⁸⁸. Moreover, American and European views on Russia's security policy reflect "a basic asymmetry": the U.S. evaluates Russian policy "in the context of its global interests and perspectives", while EU countries focus on the "security implications of Russia's actions for Europe"⁸⁹. Equally, Russian policies toward the U.S. and toward the EU are based on different calculations: since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has not yet abandoned to seek recognition from the U.S. as an equal global partner, whereas its goals towards the EU are more regionally focused⁹⁰.

⁸⁴ For the text of Bush's speech see

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020223-2.html>, 17 12 2002

⁸⁵ Lo, (note 8) p. 23.

⁸⁶ Lynch, (note 27) p. 16.

⁸⁷ Ivanov, (note 30) p. 96. See also DNB, MFA (MID), Moscow, 25 September 2001, <http://www.mid.ru>.

⁸⁸ De Spiegeleire, S., "Europe's Security Relations with Russia: Staying the Course, *Russia's Security Policy & EU-Russian Relations*, ESF Working Paper No. 6, March 2002, p. 10.

⁸⁹ Stent, A., "An American View on Russian Security Policy and EU-Russian Relations", *Russia's Security Policy & EU-Russian Relations*, ESF Working Paper No. 6, March 2002, p. 16.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

For more than a year after September 11, 2001, Putin pursued a strong U.S.-centric strategy with the clear and ambitious aim of building a partnership or even alliance with the world's remaining superpower. This seemed to serve Russia's economic, geopolitical and security goals. The only problem for Moscow was that Washington showed little interest. Russia can be only a "special" partner of America, but not an equal one. To be more precise, the U.S. does not need a universal partnership with Russia, except in some spheres, such as terrorism and nuclear disarmament; in the area of global security Russia can only be an assistant, not a partner. Bush's respectful manner toward Russia has never meant giving way on matters of substance, be it the ABM Treaty, NATO expansion eastwards or other sensitive issues.

Many commentators say that there is more common ground between the United States and Russia. Unlike Europe, the U.S. shares with Russia a more traditional view of the use of force. Moreover, the United States was far less focused on Russia's internal affairs, particularly Chechnya, than the bothersome Europeans. The war against international terrorism has proved an excellent aid for Russian domestic purposes. Russia's war against Chechen terrorism is essentially domestic. Putin has used the U.S. preoccupation with regime change in Iraq to clamp down on Chechen fighters in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. He delivered an ultimatum to Tbilisi threatening to fight Chechen terrorists on Georgian territory, justifying his position with Bush's words about the legitimate need to use "pre-emptive measures" against countries that harbour terrorists. Although both the United States and the Council of Europe criticised the Kremlin for threats against Georgia, U.S. officials themselves backed Putin's contention that some Chechen groups, including those led by the elected leader Aslan Maskhadov, are supported by foreign terrorists⁹¹. At the same time the EU policy line to maximise its relations with Arab world (notably due to the sizeable Muslim minority) has sometimes run counter to Russia's national interests. Importantly, with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Russian policy under Putin has taken a "more pro-Israeli" turn. Putin is the first leader to adopt a "more open-minded attitude towards Israel", seeking to improve ties with it⁹². Above all, Washington remains the dominant player in the areas of prime policy interest to Moscow: the fight against international terrorism, integration into the global economy, strategic disarmament agenda, and so on. Even the role of the UN, the importance of which for Russia's European policy is paramount, can only be reaffirmed with the United States.

Yet one could equally find arguments in favour of Russia's alignment with the European Union, particularly in the sphere of economic, social, and human contacts, although the sides have big potential in the field of security as well. The latter statement is supported by the geographical proximity of Russia and the European Union, and the fact that hotbeds of real or hypothetical tensions in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia are much closer to them than to the U.S. Furthermore, Russia and the EU both have a large Moslem population, and compared with the U.S. are much more vulnerable to the radical Islamic factor. They also have broader experience in dealing with it. Brussels and Moscow also share similar visions of the importance of

⁹¹ Felgenhauer, P., "Bloody Chechen Deadlock", *Moscow Times*, 26 September 2002.

⁹² Stent, Shevtsova, (note 26) p. 125.

the UN and Security Council in the new system of international relations. Building close relations with the EU is seen to ally Russia more firmly with the Euro-Atlantic community and to serve the primary task of internal revitalisation of the state. There is no doubt that economic questions occupy a prominent place in Russia's relations with other partners. But on the EU foreign policy agenda they are incomparably more important than military or purely political issues. Energy matters occupy high priority in relations between the European Union and Russia. Undoubtedly, in the future, the significance of Russia-EU energy dialogue will grow. Taking this into account, Russia has made its economic policy a serious instrument of its relations with the EU.

It should be stated that EU-Russian relations have improved significantly since Putin replaced blustering with pragmatism - but they still lack a strategic vision. As a result, bilateral relations are regularly hijacked by seemingly technical issues, such as transit rights for Kaliningrad residents. The fundamental feature of Russia-EU relations is that it is an "organic relationship", related to its immediate neighbourhood. Therefore Russia's problems with Europe are more fundamental than those with the U.S., and it is more difficult to tackle them. EU-Russian relations involve a dense network of official links, which create frequent friction. The US-Russian relationship, while lacking such networks, is more flexible and has a potential to develop at a more rapid pace⁹³.

The Iraqi campaign has challenged Vladimir Putin's move to align Russia with the Euro-Atlantic community and merely confirmed the obvious: the United States is the only superpower both in its might and in the readiness to use it. The U.S. emerged as the chief beneficiary of the war in Iraq, discrediting the anti-war stance of the "troika" (France, Germany and Russia), giving serious blow to the UN and undermining pan-European institutions. Recognition of this fact leads to the conclusion that being friends with the United States is usually beneficial, while being unfriendly is usually not. Moreover, the Iraqi crisis pushed to the surface the deeply rooted differences between the United States and Western Europe in terms of political culture, attitude towards international politics and towards the role of force in international affairs. Above all, the war in Iraq highlighted another fundamental problem - Europe's failure to form a common foreign and defence policy. In the aftermath of this war, U.S. relations with "new" Europe have improved, with Russia - have almost returned to its pre-war equilibrium, while its relations with the "old" Europe have remained contentious. Beside this, the Iraqi crisis has weakened the European security infrastructure. As Moscow wants to be with the strong and successful rather than with the weak and lagging, the logic runs, Russia's strategic alliance with the EU in foreign policy and security is not very productive for the time being.

President Putin is likely to ask himself whether there still is a Europe with which to do business. A dilemma is appearing: Putin has always stood for Russia's integration with the West; but that assumes there is the "West" and that Moscow can be friends with both Paris and Washington at the same time. But supposing it cannot? Currently Moscow is still trying to choose both and it may be able to, depending on

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 128.

how the Washington-Paris relationship works out. But if not, then which? Russia, it seems, now finds itself without a clear foreign policy strategy. But it is also probable that Moscow is willing to maintain a “dose of ambiguity”⁹⁴ in its strategy. Putin has managed to resist a temptation to play off America against “old” Europe – for which Russia has no stomach – but why not to take the opportunity to play off internal divisions within Europe to Russia’s advantage? This pragmatic ambiguity in Russia’s policy has been effective in strengthening Russia’s international role. Russia managed to preserve, although in a much weakened form, “the post-September 11 warmth in U.S.-Russian relations”. At the same time, Russia’s role vis-à-vis key European allies was strengthened⁹⁵.

With regard to Russia’s European agenda, the bottom line is that Moscow is reluctant to accept a diminished, regional role for Russia as just another important European power; the globalist approach, including the idea of the U.S. as Russia’s primary point of strategic reference, remains overriding⁹⁶. And despite the fact that Russian foreign policy subscribes to the notion of multi-polarity, in which Europe has a pivotal role, in reality it is cold pragmatism that dominates Putin’s agenda. Above all, in the purely European context, Moscow is continuing to assume that, when it comes to the difficult decisions, Western Europe tends to follow Washington’s lead – even such countries as France or Germany, which are very critical of U.S. policies.

In discussing Russia’s alignment with the Euro-Atlantic community, it is worth stressing that Putin’s pragmatism consists in accepting the reality as it is, realising that Russia has limited ability to control, let alone avert, external developments. Cooperation with Europe and the U.S., or even disagreement with America on some sensitive matters, is carefully gauged against Russian interests. Though Russia’s opposition to U.S. hegemony is very real, Putin is nothing if not pragmatic. In this sense, Moscow is likely to avoid a serious confrontation with Washington at all costs. During the whole crisis over Iraq, Moscow tried to maintain open communication with Washington, reiterating that differences would not impact the overall partnership.

From Putin’s perspective, the existence of a multipolar world order is essential. In a unipolar world, Russians fear Washington would completely ignore their interests, but in a multipolar system – even if the United States remains strongest – Russia would be a needed partner in Washington’s pursuits of its own goals. With this in mind, it is impossible for Putin to completely abandon his newfound allies in Europe, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac, even as he tries to forge a deal with Bush. This is why it is hard for him to dramatically shift Russia’s position on Iraq. In his speech on 25 September 2003 to the UN General Assembly, Putin affirmed that Moscow supports a vital role for the United Nations in world affairs, including a mandate for its oversight in Iraq. However, seeking to ingratiate himself with Washington, Putin also implied in his speech

⁹⁴ Lynch, (note 27) p. 13.

⁹⁵ Antonenko, O., “Putin risks widening the rift”, *Wall Street Journal*, 9 May, 2003.

⁹⁶ This is in accordance with Alexey Pushkov’s argument that Russia is not satisfied with becoming “a classical regional power” like Germany. See Pushkov, A., “Rossiya v novom miroponyadke: ryadom s zapadom ili sama po sebe?” [Russian in the new world order: together with the West or on its own?], *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn* [International life], No 10, 2000, p. 42.

that sending Russian peacekeepers to Iraq is possible – even operating under U.S. command – if the UN is given a mandate to govern Iraq politically until Iraqi elections are held. This is already a significant concession on Russia's part to Washington, though Putin – with an eye toward France and Germany – also has reiterated Moscow's position on establishing a firm schedule for the hand-off of power to Iraqis. All of these steps suggest that Putin aims to play the role of mediator between Washington and the Paris–Berlin bloc. The Russian political elite seemed to realise that it was not in Russia's interest to face such a divided Euro-Atlantic community if Russia wants to pursue closer economic and political ties with the developed democracies. Sergei Karaganov says that there are even calls (as unthinkable as this would have been in the recent past) in Russia today for the country to start working toward overcoming Euro-Atlantic contradictions and “to assume the role as an integrator” in the transatlantic relationship⁹⁷.

All in all, developing close political and economic ties with the major Western powers is the only alternative for Russia to achieve its most important goal - revitalisation and modernisation of the state. This goal, in Putin's view, is best pursued with the Euro-Atlantic community rather than outside it. Improving mutual trust and developing cooperation with existing institutions, notably NATO and the EU, has been chosen as the most prominent way of avoiding Russia's marginalisation from security decision-making in the European continent. There are also good economic and political reasons for Putin to focus on Europe to further its agenda of making Russia a more integral and more competitive member of the international community. There is also a widespread, long-rooted feeling in the Russian political elite and the public in general that Europe/the EU represents “the most benign face of the West, more accessible and potentially most profitable”⁹⁸ for a Russia seeking to modernise and integrate.

Conclusions

As to President Putin's pro-Western policy course, he does not have much choice but to lead the country towards the West. Putin's main vigour is that he adopts his policy to reality. In the first place, the country's internal weakness means that it is more often reactive than proactive in respect of international developments. Russia has become more an object rather than the subject (as it used to be) of international relations. With threats arising mainly internally and linking with challenges from the South and East, Moscow perceives the West as a source of solutions to many problems. A fundamental question to be dealt with: which way – through Europe or U.S. - to go to the West? For one thing, Putin, unlike Yeltsin, is giving much more Euro-centric face to Russia's relations with the West. For another thing, all that Putin wants for Russia – integration into the world economy, support for its fight against Islamic

⁹⁷ Karaganov, S., “Russia, Europe and New Challenges”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2003, p. 85.

⁹⁸ Pravda, A., “Putin's Foreign Policy after 11 September: Radical or Revolutionary?”, in Gorodetsky, G., ed., *Russia between East and West: Russian Foreign Policy on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*, Frank Cass, 2003, p. 55.

terrorism (Chechnya) and international status – are entered through a door to which Washington holds the key. Thus while many from the Russian political elites consider that Russia needs to become more “European”, their instincts remain shaped by the strategic culture that has always taken the United States as its basic point of reference.

Generally speaking, while there are signs of some important shifts in Russian foreign policy, it remains ambiguous in terms of Russia’s orientation within the Euro-Atlantic community – between the United States and Europe, NATO and the ESDP, unilateralism and multilateralism. The European orientation still remains a key priority for Russia, corresponding to centuries-old relationships and traditions, and constituting an important component of national identity. As far as “wedge-driving” between the U.S. and Europe is concerned, this would be dramatically counterproductive for Russia. Official Moscow states that Russian foreign policy priorities include developing relations both with the U.S. and Europe, and either should not be at the expense of the other. At the same time, analysts argue that in the future Moscow is likely to be drawn to events over which it has little leverage and in which the United States will more often play the vital role.

Therefore the thesis about the “Europeanisation” of Russia’s foreign policy has a dual interpretation. On the one hand, under Putin, Russian foreign policy has made a marked departure from the Primakov doctrine, not least in renouncing any challenge to the dominance of the U.S. and any confrontational stance towards the West over the issues such as the further enlargement of NATO or U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. On the other hand, for all his awareness of Russia’s diminished status, Putin continues, nevertheless, to see it as a global, as well as a regional power. If nothing else, his extensive programme of overseas visits indicates this. But it would be wrong to interpret Putin’s foreign policy priorities as a zero-sum, whereby an emphasis on, say, Europe unequivocally means reduced interest in the United States, or visa versa. What is evident from Putin’s rule, is that he is well aware that Moscow needs all parts of the West, since each has the potential to serve Russia’s interests in its own way. Moreover, stronger ties with the EU would make Russia a weightier partner for the United States and visa versa. Therefore he tries to have them both – to seek Russia’s integration with Europe and improve relations with the United States. In short, Russia under Putin is seen to retain a unique position in world affairs, but Russia’s interests are thought best advanced in close alignment with the Euro-Atlantic community rather than in opposition to it. The fact that Putin’s governing is far more active and efficient than it was under Yeltsin plays not the least role here. Thus, while it is true that Russian foreign policy is now more “European”, at the same time it is also attaching more importance to the United States. Finally, it is essential that Russia not juxtapose the progress of its ties with the U.S. and its relations with Europe, even though some illusory or real motives may prompt such juxtaposition. The strategic goal is to “maintain the balance between the U.S. and European lines of foreign policy now and try to avoid a highly inopportune preference of either partner”⁹⁹.

⁹⁹ “Russia in 2003 and its Foreign Policy: Excerpts from the Report by the Foundation for Prospective Studies and Initiatives”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2003, p. 99.

To sum up, Russia is seeking acceptance by Western Europe as much, or even more than the United States. For Moscow, the relationship with the West *per se* is driven by the need to modernise the state. In this sense, the EU plays a primary role here. Russia seems to prefer benefiting from the EU rather than being a member of it. On Russia's part there is a discernible acquiescent trend – a movement towards greater flexibility with regard to the Union. It is stated that even if the EU were to opt for a “Europe without Russia”¹⁰⁰, this does not weaken the case for close co-operation between the two not only in the economic but also in the security field.

But it is worth giving some explanation concerning the controversy surrounding Russia's choice between the U.S. and Europe. Despite all the disagreements between Russia and the U.S., despite the great distrust that Moscow has of Washington, more so than of any other European capital, even despite the U.S. tendency toward unilateralism, Washington is seen as a much more efficient and transparent partner than Brussels. There are many EU-Russian problems leading to this: bridging the gap with the EU in terms of bringing Russian laws, regulations and standards to the EU level; institutional hurdles on both sides, plus the doubts among the political and business elites over the desirability and efficiency of rapprochement and mutual integration, and others. Most important, as opposed to Russia's relations with the U.S., the Russia-EU relationship is one between two close neighbours. It is always more difficult to preserve “organic relations”: they manifest themselves on a daily basis, are much more institutionalised (embrace a dense network of links among various institutions), and thus less flexible.

The emergence of the EU as a new player in European security, has presented Russia with a range of opportunities relating both to continuing efforts to strengthening Russia's voice in European security affairs and to Putin's emphasis on a closer partnership with the EU. With all this in mind, Moscow has striven equally to upgrade Russia's relations with Europe, as well as with the United States, having understood that most EU countries would be more inclined to treat Russia as a reliable partner if Russia's relations with the U.S. were stable and constructive.

In overall terms, how close Moscow's co-operation with the Euro-Atlantic community becomes in the longer term “depends on fundamental issues of compatibility”¹⁰¹ between Russia and the leading states of this community. It is not simply a matter of Russia's competing effectively on world markets. Although the state is becoming stronger under Vladimir Putin, neither the pace of its modernisation nor its defence and foreign policy live up to the needs for the country. Finally, in order to become an integral part of that community, Russia needs to become a state of pluralist democracy that scarcely fits in with Putin's domestic and political agenda.

¹⁰⁰ Trenin, (note 52) p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Pravda, (note 98) p. 41.