

THE RETURN OF THE PAN-EUROPEAN SECURITY QUESTION

The author offers an overview of the key trends in the evolution of European security at three levels –pan-European, transatlantic and the EU– over three distinct periods since the end of the Cold War. At the eve of a new phase of pan-European discussions, the Russian proposal with respect to pan-European security is considered. The author concludes by stating that it is the question of Russia’s place in the European family that is at stake at the current stage. The scope and duration of renewed pan-European work will depend on the objective that Russia itself sets for its future.

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Since the end of the Cold War, security trends in Europe have been dominated by three key questions. First, the “pan-European question”; that is, how to build and maintain a security system involving all countries of Greater Europe, including Russia and the successor states of the Soviet Union as well as the more westward-oriented states of Central and Eastern Europe. Second, how to sustain a meaningful transatlantic relationship (an objective considered essential by most European countries). Finally, how to create a distinctly European defense identity within the European Union (EU) through the CFSP and ESDP processes.

The evolution of the pan-European question has been especially interesting. The theme has been recurrent over the last twenty years, moving at different times to the foreground or shifting to the background of mainstream debates. In 2008-2009, the question has moved to the front burner of European security discussions, starting with the proposal of President Medvedev in June 2008 to work toward a new European security treaty. In order to better understand the Russian proposal, a review of the evolution of European security since 1990 is useful. Since the end of the Cold War, the three core security questions have evolved together and in relation with each other. The relationship between the pan-European and the transatlantic themes has been most salient. Perhaps contrary to expectation, experience shows that efforts to sustain the transatlantic relationship have acted often as a driving force behind the development of pan-European activities – rather than an obstacle to it. On at least three key occasions –during the strengthening of the CSCE and the two waves of NATO enlargement– the transatlantic dynamic and the pan European dimension have moved in concert. At other moments, however, the aspirations for a distinctly European defense identity have played a catalytic role at the pan-European level. And, of course, the pan-European aspiration itself has presented a complicated challenge – namely, how to balance the desire of some states for rapid integration into “Western” structures (the EU and NATO) with the need to maintain a rules-based security order that includes all of Europe’s security actors.

This paper will review key trends in the evolution of European security at these three levels since the end of the Cold War. Without seeking to review the historical developments in their entirety, three distinct periods are examined in particular: a first moment in the early 1990s, a second period, between 1997 and 2007, which saw several, sometimes contradictory strands of development, and a final moment starting in 2007 with the rise of what might be called the “Russia challenge.” In conclusion, the paper identifies the main questions that are raised by the pan-European theme in European security today.

Three Key Moments in European Security

First Moment: The early 1990s, and the Thwarted Ambitions of Greater Europe

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 marked the start of a period of intense diplomatic activity, involving European states, the United States of America and the Soviet Union, and that focused initially on the reunification of Germany. Very quickly, the United States expressed its desire to retain a reunified Germany inside NATO (as early as 12 November 1989). The idea was that this would work in parallel with the activities of the CSCE in overseeing the transition towards a new post Cold War European security architecture. At the time, France put forward reservations focusing on the need to preserve the political unity of the EU and its defense prospects.¹ In this line, Paris pushed for the drafting of a European security charter. Not without difficulty, the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev would finally be persuaded of the utility of keeping Germany inside NATO also as grounds for an enduring U.S. presence in Europe.² This process was accompanied, most Russian and some Western observers would say, by informal assurances that NATO military forces and infrastructure would not move further to the East (not even within the united Germany, which continued to observe a special regime for the five new Länder in deference to Russian sensitivities), and perhaps (depending upon who is telling the tale) that NATO itself would not enlarge to include other former Warsaw Pact states. The point is important to note, because (whether true or not) it later became a major source of later Russian disillusionment with Western institutions. The outcome of these discussions hinged on the results of three summits that had complementary political content: The NATO Summit in London (5 and 6 July 1990) reaffirmed the need for an Atlantic oriented Germany; the CSCE Paris Summit (19 to 21 November 1990) agreed on the Charter for a New Europe; and the Maastricht Summit (9 and 10 November 1991) provided impetus to the economic and monetary union and CFSP.

Within the CSCE, the 1990 Paris Charter and the follow-up 1992 Helsinki Summit set forth an ambitious, inclusive pan-European framework incorporating all countries around a comprehensive concept of security.³ Through this impetus, the CSCE rapidly gained substance, acquiring a body of commitments spanning the three security dimensions as well as permanent institutions. These pan-European trends were strengthened by the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) that limited the conventional weapons and

¹ The reference analysis of French policy in this period is Frederic Bozo, Mitterrand, *la fin de la guerre froide et l'unification allemande*, Odile Jacob, 2005.

² On the process of German reunification, see Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, Harvard University Press, 1995.

³ For an excellent Russian analysis of these developments, see Andrei Zagorski, *The Helsinki Process*, Human Rights Publishing House, Moscow, 2005.

postures of the members of two military alliances, and also by the development of political-military CSBMs bringing in all Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian states.

Taken together, these developments underlined the ambition to provide a framework for European security that joined all states on the basis of shared values and the commitment to active cooperation. In many respects, the Soviet Union negotiated an exit from the Cold War through the political space that was provided by this framework. At the same time, however, the Soviet collapse and the emergence of 15 successor states made it difficult to maintain the underlying bipolar dynamic that might have kept this “common European home” in line with Russian interests, and that would also have gone some way in the direction of a European confederation, as put forward by François Mitterrand in early 1991.

The idea behind the CSCE was to provide a pan-European framework for the collective management of the continent’s problems after the end of the Cold War, with all that this entailed – including the departure of the American troops to the Persian Gulf. In the end, events proved otherwise. The CSCE framework did not mature sufficiently quickly to assume responsibility, even with the Western European Union (WEU), for handling the upheavals resulting from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The United Nations assumed primary responsibility in the area, working later after facing serious challenges on the ground with the support of NATO. The OSCE (as successor to the CSCE) came to focus on managing the conflicts in the former Soviet Union, deploying field operations with mandates for conflict prevention and democracy support.

After a moment of uncertainty at the start of the decade, NATO returned, indeed, as the security institution of reference for most European states.⁴ This “return” was hastened by the United States’ political and military engagement in the Western Balkans and also by the rapid maturation of the idea of enlarging the Alliance to former members of the Warsaw Pact. In summer 1993, the Russian President, Boris Yeltsin conceded in Warsaw that Russia would have no objections to Poland joining NATO. Still aiming for “pan-European” security structures, the United States pushed in parallel the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, to which the Russian Federation remained quite cool, only signing the PfP status of forces agreement in April 2005.

A dual policy approach, thus, emerged: enlargement to include (three) new members was combined with the creation of an instrument specifically directed to mitigate Russia’s concerns, in the shape of the Founding Act between NATO and Russia (27 May 1997) that, inter alia, created the Permanent Joint Council. Thus, the positive response to NATO aspirants ran in parallel with the

⁴ The reference text on this process remains Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door, How the Alliance remade itself for a New Era*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002.

establishment of a new pan European channel centered on NATO itself. It is interesting to recall in this respect that the question of Russia's accession to NATO had been raised in late 1991 in a letter signed by Boris Yeltsin.

Second Moment: Contrary Currents, 1997-2007

After 1997, relations between Russia and its Euro-Atlantic partners became more difficult, and at times even strained. Contrary currents can be seen at work over this period. On the one hand, crises in the Western Balkans, particularly the NATO operation against Yugoslavia in 1999 and Russia's military response to instability in Chechnya proved to be major bones of contention between the West and Russia. Tensions over these conflicts had their impact on the effective work of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, which was "frozen" by the Russian side in March 1999. At the same time, the door to qualitatively better co-operation remained open, as evidenced by Russia's continued (until 2003) participation in NATO-led peace support operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, and –perhaps most dramatically– in President Putin's response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and the subsequent establishment of the NATO-Russia Council.

During the first part of this period, the OSCE continued to function as a useful forum for pan-European negotiations, following in the wake of the 1994 Budapest summit and in the run-up to the 1999 Istanbul summit. In Budapest, Russia agreed to the institutionalization of the CSCE and to the adaptation of the CFE Treaty and the Vienna Document on Confidence and Security Building Measures. Over the next four years, the OSCE hosted negotiations on a European Security Charter, including a "Platform for Cooperative Security", which sought to provide the OSCE with a coordinating (albeit non-hierarchical) function in respect to other European security institutions. These two documents were adopted by the participating States at an OSCE summit in Istanbul in 1999 (significantly, the last summit of the OSCE to date). Commitments were also undertaken at Istanbul that demonstrated a minimum amount of Russian goodwill with respect to Georgia and Moldova.

The period was also active for the WEU, whose structures and strategies for crisis management were gradually handed over to the EU at successive European summits following in the wake of the Franco-British Saint-Malo agreement in 1998. It is notable that Turkey was left out of this transfer – a lacuna that continues to cloud relations between ESDP and NATO. Nonetheless, the EU developed quickly a strong profile in the low spectrum crisis management. EU enlargement in 2004 and then 2007 to 12 new member states also transformed the political geography of large parts of Central Europe and the Mediterranean region. Throughout this period, the EU also strengthened relations with Russia through

regular meetings and high level contacts, including agreement in 2003 on the building of four “Common Spaces” with Russia and the creation of a Permanent Partnership Council – all of which formed part also of the panoply of pan-European relations.

At the same time, the overall climate of strategic relations was polluted by the run-up and invasion of Iraq. Despite the attendant difficulties, it is noteworthy that the two sessions of the NATO-Russia Council in 2004 saw notable similarities of opinion. In April, the participants welcomed the new NATO members to the Council and expressed their support for NATO action in Kosovo. Later that year, in December, Russia agreed to a joint NRC ministerial declaration that was instrumental in breaking the post-electoral political deadlock in Ukraine. The NRC also saw consistent Russian support for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. In January 2005, in outlining Moscow’s security policy before Russia’s Security Council, President Putin expressed deep satisfaction over Russian co operation with NATO. For all of these positive signs, however, countervailing trends were already gathering pace.

Third Moment: The Rising Russian Challenge

Cooperation started to sour. For one, the Russian Federation perceived that its support to international efforts in Afghanistan and, to a lesser degree, on Iraq was not adequately reciprocated by the West. As the domestic economic situation stabilized in Russia and its economy started to grow on booming oil-prices, Moscow regained a sense of confidence and assertiveness in its international standing. In the process, the Russian Federation started to question the validity of the existing Euro-Atlantic security institutions, which it perceived as being aimed at containing and isolating Russia. In parallel, Moscow worked to strengthen the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where it felt at ease in promoting specifically Russian interests.

A new Russian orientation was palpable within the OSCE, where Russian policy became increasingly critical with respect to the Organization’s acquis – to the point that Moscow set restrictive limits on OSCE observation of Russian elections in 2007. In parallel, Russia suspended in 2007 participation in the CFE Treaty. The question of the status of Kosovo and its possible independence became a heated subject of dispute both inside and outside the Organization, with Moscow’s position once again separating it from the United States and most (but not all) members of the EU and NATO. The interweaving of these factors has given rise to growing reservations about the viability of the OSCE as a whole.

NATO priorities have evolved largely in relation to a deepening commitment to

promoting stability in Afghanistan. The operational needs of ISAF have made the presence of the Alliance felt on Russia's doorstep in Central Asia. The pan-European dimension of the Alliance has become increasingly focused on reassuring new member states (often by taking operational steps viewed in Russia as provocative) and moving toward closer integration with Russia's neighbors (such as Ukraine and Georgia). Gone is the pragmatic development of mutual political assurances that characterized relations between NATO and Russia throughout the 1990s. From Moscow's perspective, even the commitments that NATO members had already undertaken in the 1997 Founding Act regarding the disposition of forces and bases have been unilaterally re-interpreted by NATO in ways that run counter to Russian interests. In addition, U.S. plans to deploy anti-missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic are seen in Moscow as a serious challenge to the strategic balance.

EU policy towards Russia, the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia has developed some additional clarity with the development of the European Neighborhood Policy, the 2007 Strategy for Central Asia, the 2009 Eastern Partnership and the appointment of EU Special Representatives to Moldova, the South Caucasus, Georgia and Central Asia. These developments responded also to the rising demand for a greater EU role from many countries in the former Soviet Union, while disappointing those interested in full EU integration. With time, these measures have started to clarify the definition of EU interests in these regions, including specifically in the area of energy security. The Russian Federation has viewed the rising EU profile with consternation, as the Union has become an increasingly inconvenient and demanding partner for Moscow in areas of vital Russian interest. In some instances, Russian policy has sought to counter actively the rising EU role on the ground.

Russian disenchantment with existing European security structures was expressed at the highest level by President Putin at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in February 2007. Putin was sharply critical of the current situation in greater Europe, particularly with regard to the CFE Treaty and anti-missile defense. His criticism of the OSCE itself was vehement, with the Organization written off as a 'vulgar instrument' of the foreign policy of other states. Beneath all the emotional rhetoric, Russia argued that the OSCE had lost balance in the geographic and the functional focus of its activities, with most activities occurring 'east of Vienna' and in the so-called Human Dimension.

This was followed on 5 June 2008 by the call of the new Russian President, Dimitri Medvedev, in his first major foreign policy speech, for a renewed dialogue on pan-European security. The Russian President called for the adoption of a legally binding pan-European security treaty that would reconfirm the basic principles of the Helsinki Final Act, including those especially cherished by Russia,

namely indivisibility of security, reasonable sufficiency of armed forces, the sovereignty of states and inviolability of borders, as well as the non recourse to force and peaceful settlement of disputes. The treaty would focus on politico-military questions, especially issues of arms control, giving short shift to the other OSCE security dimensions. In the proposal, Russia has called for the involvement of all relevant security organizations, including NATO, the EU, the OSCE, the CSTO as well as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Moscow proposed that a summit meeting should be held to launch the discussions on the treaty – without specifying in detail within which framework this might occur. At Evian in October 2008, President Sarkozy seized on the issue and proposed the summit be held within the framework of the OSCE.

Initial reactions by Russia's partners have been cautious. The commitment to existing security institutions is deeply felt by many countries in the Euro-Atlantic area, and there is concern about the implications of the Russian proposal. The latent worry is that the Russian proposal, in fact, seeks to institute a Russian veto on the further development of other security organizations, especially that of NATO. In addition, the conflict in Georgia in August 2008 sowed new doubts among many countries about the nature of Russian foreign policy, and about Moscow's willingness to live up to the standards set forth by President Medvedev. Since 2008, the Russian position has shifted towards acceptance of the need to reaffirm all basic OSCE principles and the possibility of preparatory discussions taking place within the OSCE framework – all of this, despite strong reservations from Moscow about the Organization.

New Questions for Pan-European Security

Has a new cycle been launched by the Russian proposal with respect to pan-European security? Will this lead to changes in the responsibilities of existing security organizations? How might the Russian proposal be taken forward?

The debate began at the Helsinki OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in December 2008, when 50 of the 56 OSCE Foreign Ministers held a working lunch to examine these issues. The debate will see further progress at the informal OSCE ministerial meeting being organized in Corfu by the Greek OSCE Chairmanship in late June 2009. In this ongoing discussion, the participants, including Sergey Lavrov, Hillary Clinton, the Turkish Foreign Minister and the EU High Representative, will have to address the following five questions.

First, what should be the objective of a process of reviewing existing pan-European security practices?

The Russian proposal for a new treaty meets with little approval as it stands. However, a revival of negotiations on conventional arms control would be well received and could be extended to new confidence building measures. In addition, Europe's security organizations could be encouraged to intensify consultations and coordination. Energy security issues also could emerge as an important theme for discussion. Indeed, Russia made suggestions in this area in early 2009. Through the new eastern partnership, the EU may come to provide striking example of new forms of action in the OSCE second dimension. For the moment, however, it is too early to judge.

With so many issues, it will take time to identify the key elements of the new balance that might be struck between the three security dimensions of the OSCE. The Russian Federation would also be advised to table concrete ideas to start convincing partners that these are well-founded. The members of both NATO and the EU have not yet begun systematic thinking about these questions, while the new U.S. Administration has not yet commented. At the same time, there is no reason that Europeans, working with Turkey, should not develop their own thoughts and advance distinct proposals, including on specific issues such as arms control (Germany is poised to do precisely this).

Second, under which framework should a renewed pan-European dialogue occur?

The Russian idea of a summit to launch the debate assumed a fair amount of ad hoc preparation. For the moment, Russian diplomacy has been pleased to allow discussions to take place within the OSCE, a line adopted also by the EU, NATO and the new U.S. Administration. The informal OSCE ministerial meeting in Corfu could lead, therefore, to the launch of a more structured process that would mobilize the OSCE. With this, these permanent representatives of the 56 OSCE participating States would prepare decisions for adoption at the Athens Ministerial Council planned for December 2009. It is important in this respect that the incoming OSCE Chairmanship, Kazakhstan, is open to the idea of organizing a summit level meeting in 2010. In addition, other relevant security organizations may be called upon to contribute to the debate, starting with NATO, which has acquired a pivotal role in pan-European relations through the NATO Russia Council. The question of participation by other security organizations, including the CSTO and all other relevant organizations, will have to be addressed.

Part of this question concerns also the issue of how to refresh the concept of multidimensional security in Europe today. In this respect, it will be necessary to ensure that the debate on economic and environmental issues is brought into the mainstream of wider discussions.

Third, what will be the impact of politically difficult questions in greater Europe on the prospects and course of a new pan-European dialogue?

The repercussions of the conflict in Georgia in August 2008 have still not been fully addressed. The Geneva Discussions have yielded few results thus far, the OSCE field operation has withdrawn from Georgia in the absence of an agreement between Russia and its partners, and the situation on the ground has remained tense. Moscow is perceived by many countries as seeking to establish a direct area of influence regardless of the diplomatic costs. The tensions arising from the Georgian question never fail to be expressed every time the Foreign Ministers meet, and they have colored the start of the new pan-European dialogue. Other questions may also have an impact on these discussions, especially to the extent that they involve Russia directly in crisis management. This is the case in Afghanistan, a key question for NATO, where the efforts of the international community would benefit greatly from a more committed Russian position.

Fourth, how will underlying power dynamics evolve between the major actors that are involved in the possible new pan-European dialogue?

The economic crisis has a deep impact on all countries, including the Russian Federation. Despite rising difficulties, Russian confidence has not weakened, especially as other actors also face serious challenges. The fact remains that major difficulties resulting from the crisis, from the point of view of Russia's partners, are seen to concern the impact on societies, the ability to continue cooperative relationships developed over the last few years, and rising instability at the edges of Europe. In the current context, it will be difficult to mobilize within greater Europe the levels of attention and commitment that existed at the end of the Cold War to politico military questions. Nor is the weight of Russia of the same order as that of the Soviet Union.

Finally, what place will questions of pan-European security occupy in relations between Russia and the EU and between Russia and the United States?

Opinions vary among Europeans when it comes to the question of according real importance to the Russian initiative. Many also have doubts about the need for efforts to reach agreement on the lines proposed. The EU will follow carefully the approach taken by the U.S. Administration. The July U.S.-Russia summit in Moscow will be the bell weather in this respect. The EU will then face the challenge of defining a common approach to a range of complex issues. Since the end of the Cold War, progress on pan-European questions had moved hand in hand with progress at the Transatlantic and European levels. In 2009, the situation is different. The starting point of most Europeans and North Americans is deep satisfaction with the existing system for European security.

Today, there is no widely shared sense of the need to readjust the balance towards a major pan-European revival.

The new phase of pan-European discussions promises, therefore, to be different to previous moments. What is more, the range of tools available for these discussions has become more diverse. More than ever, it is the question of Russia's place in the European family that is at stake. The scope and duration of renewed pan-European work will depend on the objective that Russia itself sets for its future. It is up to all of Russia's partners to assist in this delicate undertaking.