

Neighbourhood Perceptions of the Ukraine Crisis

From the Soviet Union into Eurasia?

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First published 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

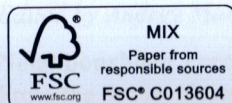
ISBN: 978-1-4724-8494-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-59774-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

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4 Russian perceptions of the Ukrainian crisis

From confrontation to damage limitation?¹

Alexander Sergunin

Introduction

The Ukrainian crisis was a serious challenge – both politically and intellectually – to Russian foreign policy thinking. According to two Russian classic writers, Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Chernyshevsky, there are two Russian ‘perennial questions’: Who is guilty? And what should be done?

Various answers to the first question are offered by different Russian foreign policy schools. For the Russian IR (international relations) mainstream (geopolitics/realism) it is absolutely clear that the West (particularly the United States and the EU) should be blamed for the Ukrainian crisis.² This (hard-line) school believes that by helping the nationalist forces in Ukraine to oust the pro-Russian regime of Viktor Yanukovich, the West wanted to withdraw this country from Moscow’s sphere of influence and side-line Russia in the post-Soviet domain. The members fully approve of Vladimir Putin’s policies for Crimea’s integration into Russia and support the breakaway Donetsk and Lughansk People’s Republics (DPR and LPR). The radical version of this school even suggests that the concept of ‘Novorossiya’ (New Russia) should not be limited to Donbass alone, but should include other eastern and southern regions of Ukraine (from Kharkov to Odessa).³

The opposite – liberal/soft-line – school tends to agree with the hard-liners that the current Ukrainian government came into power in an illegitimate way. They blame the Ukrainian radicals and nationalists for ousting Yanukovich by force and for passing anti-Russian legislation that alienated Crimea and Ukraine’s southern and eastern regions from Kiev. The Russian soft-liners consider the West’s reluctance from the very beginning to distance itself from the Ukrainian extremists to be a serious mistake. However, they also hold the Kremlin responsible for backing the Yanukovich regime and thus plunging the country into crisis.

The liberals believe that Putin overreacted to the anti-Yanukovich ‘revolution’ when he annexed Crimea and threatened Kiev with military intervention to protect the ethnic Russians in the south-east, and in the process violated existing international legal obligations regarding Ukraine. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has recognized Ukraine as a sovereign independent state within its current borders. Now, the liberals maintain, Russia has trampled on all of those treaties, agreements and guarantees under the false premise of protecting Russian-speakers in Crimea from ‘persecution.’⁴

For some liberals, Putin's Crimean 'adventure' is a natural continuation of his recent political program, which is characterized domestically by virulent nationalism and authoritarianism, and internationally by anti-Western rhetoric and clear designs to restore the former Soviet Empire.⁵

There is also a moderate/hybrid school which tries to reconcile these extremes and develop a more balanced/objective view of the Ukrainian crisis. According to this school, the main sources of the Ukrainian crisis lie within the country itself. The Ukrainian political and economic elites were unable to develop sustainable socio-economic strategies and, thus, to consolidate society. Coupled with rampant corruption and the administrative apparatus' striking incompetence, these factors eventually led to social unrest and the split between different Ukrainian regions.

However, the proponents of this school maintain that foreign players, including the EU, United States and Russia, have also fuelled Ukraine's internal conflicts. For example, they point out that Ukraine became a sort of a field of rivalry between the EU and Russian soft power projects over the last decade. Brussels tried to embrace Kiev *via* the Eastern Partnership Program, while Moscow planned to do that through the Customs Union (later the Eurasian Economic Union).⁶ In reality, both projects failed under the Yanukovich regime and this added to the domestic turmoil in Ukraine.

The ambition of this paper, however, is to focus on the second question: What should be done now or, in other words, how will Russia's foreign policy look in the post-crisis period?

Conceptual/doctrinal basis

First and foremost, it should be noted that the Ukrainian crisis will inevitably entail an essential revision of the conceptual/doctrinal basis behind Russian foreign and national security policies.

Such a revision has already started with regard to Russia's military strategy. On 26 December 2014, President Vladimir Putin signed an updated version of the military doctrine. The amendments were approved by the Security Council on 19 December 2014. The new doctrine highlights 'NATO's military build-up' and the bloc's expansion towards the Russian borders as being the main external dangers to Russia's security. Other threats mentioned in the document include the development and deployment of the United States strategic missile defence systems, the implementation of the 'global strike' doctrine, plans to place weapons in space, deployment of high-precision conventional weapons systems as well as evolving forms of warfare such as information warfare. For the first time, protection of Russia's peacetime national interests in the Arctic was assigned to the Russian armed forces.

The doctrine shows increased Russian interest in improving its own ability to use precision conventional weapons. For the first time, the concept of non-nuclear deterrence was introduced into the document. This reflects the fact that most of the military threats that Russia now faces are of non-nuclear character and can be successfully met through conventional means. However, the central question of

when Moscow might feel compelled to use nuclear weapons remains unchanged from the position laid out in the previous (2010) doctrine.⁷ In general, the new version of the military doctrine retains its defensive nature.

Among domestic sources of danger, the doctrine identifies internal threats as being activities aimed at destabilizing the situation in the country, terrorist activities to harm Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the fuelling of inter-ethnic and religious conflicts as well as actions involving anti-Russian and anti-patriotic propaganda (especially among young people).

The new doctrine does, however, differ from the previous one in treating internal threats to the country as military ones. The 2010 strategy merely referred to 'attempts at violent change of the Russian Federation's constitutional order,' 'undermining sovereignty, violation of unity and territorial integrity,'⁸ while the new document adds 'the destabilization of the domestic, political and social situation in the nation' and even 'information-related activity aimed at influencing the population, primarily the country's young citizens, with the goal of undermining the historical, spiritual and patriotic traditions in the area of defending the Fatherland.'⁹ Such a broad interpretation of internal threats may lead to perceptions that any political opposition could potentially represent an activity requiring a military response.

In late July 2015, President Putin approved a new version of Russia's maritime doctrine, which included both naval and civilian components.¹⁰ As the Russian Vice-Premier Dmitry Rogozin explained, the novelty of the document is that it emphasizes the priority of two regions – the North Atlantic and Arctic, where NATO activities and international competition for natural resources and sea routes continue to grow and require Russia's 'adequate response.'¹¹ Along with naval forces, the nuclear icebreaker fleet will be modernized by 2020.

In parallel, Russia's Security Council announced that it is updating its national security and information security doctrines through 2020, a move that brings the two into line with Russia's 2014 military doctrine. The updates are partly in response to 'the developments of the Arab Spring, in Syria and Iraq, [and] the situation in and around Ukraine,' Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev explained. He specifically mentioned NATO's build-up in Eastern Europe as a catalyst for the decision to amend its doctrines. 'The United States and NATO are growing more and more aggressive [with] respect [to] Russia. They are building up their offensive potential in the direct proximity [of] our borders and are actively deploying a global missile defence system,' said Patrushev.¹²

As far as the information security doctrine is concerned, the Security Council said the new document would prioritize 'strengthening state guarantees of privacy, improving the competitiveness of Russian products' and improving hardware and software to beef up national information security infrastructure.¹³

It is also expected that a new Russian foreign concept will be developed. The Kremlin deems the current foreign concept, which was adopted in 2013, as too optimistic about the future world order. The document acknowledges threats and challenges to Russia's security, but it also emphasizes opportunities together with the need for the country to be active.¹⁴ As part of this foreign policy strategy,

it emphasizes the importance of soft power, famously defined as the ability 'to shape the preferences of others'¹⁵ but, at the same time, underestimates the need to use military force to protect Russia's national interests.

The question about the role of soft power in Moscow's post-Ukrainian international strategy remains in the focus of Russian foreign policy debate. It should be noted that the Kremlin's turn to the soft power concept was no accident over the last decade. A number of powerful factors, such as the discernible need to redesign its foreign policy doctrine in line with present-day standards, to improve its international image and strengthen Russia's world-wide authority (especially in the post-Soviet domain), encouraged Moscow to become closely acquainted with the soft power concept. It has been firmly embedded in both Russia's foreign policy discourse and political machinery since the late 2000s.

In contrast to some wide-spread stereotypes, I believe that Moscow did not restrict itself to simply copying the soft power concept. The Russian understanding of soft power strongly deviates from both the 'classic' interpretation (Nye-based) and the version suggested by other Western academics and practitioners. The Russian interpretation of soft power is primarily instrumentalist, pragmatic and interest-centred. The 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Concept defines soft power as a 'set of instruments' that is helpful in achieving foreign policy aims by means of civil society institutions, IT and communication, humanitarian and other methods that differ markedly from classical diplomacy.¹⁶ President Putin proved to be even more pragmatic and instrumentalist by defining the soft power as a mere foreign policy tool, or technology that either helps to lobby Moscow's interests in foreign countries or to improve Russia's international image.¹⁷

The lack of well-defined terminology and the use of overlapping concepts is another remarkable feature of Russian scholarship on soft power. To make further theoretical progress, Russian academia should also develop its conceptual apparatus and reach a consensus on basic terms related to the soft power dilemma.

It should also be noted that such a strategy represents a combination of idealized and material motives. On the one hand, the Kremlin sees soft power as an important instrument in returning and maintaining Russia's status of being a great power, as well as in shaping the future world order and making the West (particularly the United States) abide by the rules of that order. On the other hand, Moscow – in quite a pragmatic way – views the soft power strategy as an efficient tool for promoting its national interests in foreign countries, coalition-building and counter-balancing the West in the global geopolitical game.

I tend to agree with other authors' assessments that Russian soft power performs rather contradictorily at the present time: on the one hand, Russia possesses huge soft power resources of an economic, societal, political and cultural nature. On the other hand, Moscow is often incapable of using these resources in a proper and coherent way. As Nye points out, 'for China and Russia to succeed, they will need to match words and deeds in their policies, be self-critical, and unleash the full talents of their civil societies.'¹⁸

Is Russia able to effectively implement its soft power strategy? Unlike other experts who often succumb to the temptation to give straightforward and simple

(sometimes simplistic) answers to this important question, I would prefer to assume a more sophisticated approach. In general, I would answer in the affirmative because numerous examples of the effectiveness of Russia's soft power diplomacy can be found, especially in post-Soviet countries. However, it goes without saying that numerous shortcomings (notably the lack of co-ordination between various governmental bodies responsible for soft power policies, and between the government and NGOs) as well as international crises, including those in Georgia and Ukraine, make the Russian soft power policies less effective and sometimes undercut the Kremlin's strategies in neighbouring regions. There is still a long way to go to bring Moscow's soft power strategy up to widely accepted standards in order to make Russia a really attractive international partner.

One further difficult question for Moscow incorporates how to combine soft and hard (military) power arsenals in its future foreign and security policies, and how to develop a 'smart power' concept of its own? This is not a purely theoretical question; on the contrary, it is a very practical one. As a series of 'coloured revolutions' in the post-Soviet domain and the Arab East have demonstrated, soft security challenges can quickly transform into hard security threats for ruling regimes. The Kremlin makes no pretence of hiding the fact that one of its main strategic aims for the foreseeable future is to prevent any internal or external threat to the existing political regime. Russian leaders point out that soft power methods may well be preferable but, at the same time, they underline that they would not hesitate to use coercive instruments against opponents – domestic or foreign – if any such existential threat were to emerge.

One of the remarkable changes in the Russian foreign policy philosophy, which is gradually taking place in the post-Ukrainian crisis era, is the return of the famous concept of peaceful coexistence. Moscow's renewed interest in this concept can be explained by the following reasons:

- Russia's previous models of relations with the West simply did not work: comprehensive security (late Gorbachev era); Russia is the West's 'younger partner' (Kozyrev era); co-operative security (late Yeltsin and early Putin periods); strategic (or just) partnerships (Putin's second and Medvedev's administrations).
- Since the mid-2000s, Moscow has become increasingly dissatisfied with the West's reluctance to respect Russia's global and regional interests and to treat her as an equal partner (Putin's Munich speech of 2007 marked the moment when the Kremlin started to redesign its foreign policy utilising a more assertive approach).
- As previously mentioned, greater emphasis on soft power instruments was needed (especially in the post-Soviet domain) and the concept of peaceful coexistence was better designed for this purpose (although the soft power concept was interpreted differently from Nye's version).
- From the Kremlin's point of view, the concept of coexistence helped to overcome previous policies' shortcomings, reconcile extremes and to integrate different approaches to a single and clear strategy.

It should be noted, however, that Russia's present-day interpretation of coexistence is different from the original Soviet understanding. Differences between the two versions can be described in the following ways:

- The Soviet and post-Soviet concepts have different ideological underpinnings: the Soviet version was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, while the current version has no clear ideological fundament (the so-called national idea has not yet been determined).
- The strategic goals and roles of the concept of coexistence in foreign policy strategies are different. In the Soviet era, the strategic aim was the elimination of world capitalism and the world-wide victory of socialism. The concept of coexistence was a strategy for the period of transition and it did not replace the principle of class struggle, one of the most important theoretical concepts of Marxist-Leninism. Currently, Moscow has no such revolutionary/radical objective. Its character is more defensive rather than offensive.
- The geopolitical contexts are completely different. In the Cold War era, the USSR was a superpower, a leader of the socialist world. Post-Soviet Russia lost its superpower status and is trying to regain and secure its 'normal great power' status. Moscow does not lead any powerful coalition or alliance. In the wake of the Ukrainian crisis it actually found itself in semi-isolation. Geopolitically, Russia is in a situation comparable to the position of the post-revolutionary/post-Civil War Soviet Russia, the moment when the Lenin-Chicherin doctrine of peaceful coexistence was born (Genoa conference, 1922).

It should be noted that the concept of coexistence is not yet a part of Russia's active political vocabulary; many Russian academics and politicians are quite antagonistic towards the Leninist/Soviet type of the peaceful coexistence doctrine. However, the concept has implicitly already returned to Russian foreign policy discourse. The current interpretation of the peaceful concept of coexistence can be summarized in the following ways:

- The Kremlin fundamentally believes that countries with different socio-economic and political systems can coexist peacefully.
- At the same time, Moscow does not accept that one or more dominant state(s) simply impose(s) rules on the rest of the world; instead it favours a multi-polar world model (the concept that is now dominant in Russian foreign policy discourse).
- Soft power instruments are preferable.
- Military power is the last resort, a tool to be used as an exception, not a rule.
- This concept is mostly designed with regard to Russia's relations with the West/developed countries. Moscow's relations with the CIS and developing countries are based on other theoretical/conceptual principles ranging from the moderate version of Eurasianism to various interpretations of the partnership model.

As far as the regional priorities of Russia's future foreign policy are concerned, my analysis will start from the most critical issue – Moscow's policies on the Ukrainian crisis – which will definitely affect other aspects of the Kremlin's international course.

The Ukrainian question

Russian experts suggest three main scenarios for future developments in the Ukrainian crisis:¹⁹

- *Confrontation* (defined as 'Balkanization,' as it is fraught with the internationalization of the current conflict). If the Minsk II peace process were to fail, hostilities in southeast Ukraine could easily resume. In turn, this could entail US deliveries of lethal weapons to Kiev and Moscow's subsequent direct engagement in the military conflict. Such a confrontation scenario would appear to be the most risky for Russia, since it would affect a wide range of the country's foreign policing problems and directly impact its economic situation and domestic policies. An open military conflict between Russia and Ukraine would destroy any residual elements of the post-Cold War security order in Europe and would require a new order to be built, almost from scratch.
- *A 'Frozen conflict' scenario*. This is a scenario that is possible in an environment where neither party is interested in serious concessions or compromises but, at the same time, they are not in a position to implement their maximalist program. Ukraine has limited resources to defeat the separatists if it does not want to risk escalating tensions with Russia (including Moscow's direct military involvement). Meanwhile, if Russia were to increase support to the self-proclaimed republics of Donbass, it would risk entering a new Cold War. The West is interested in co-operating with Russia on the issues of Iran, Syria and Afghanistan, as well as in the fight against Islamic State. At the same time, it fears Moscow's unilateral strengthening of its positions in the 'near abroad' as well as the transformation of Russia's foreign policy into a Eurasian version of the 'Monroe Doctrine.' In this scenario, concerns about heightened stakes could play the role of deterrent.

Under this scenario, Russia would become a donor to the Donbass republics while guaranteeing the survival of the population and largely assuming the responsibility for rebuilding their infrastructure. For Moscow, support for the DPR and LPR would not simply be a means of pressure on Kiev, but an attempt to build a political system modelled on Transnistria with a gradual reduction in the role of warlords.

In this scenario, Ukraine would not agree to official negotiations with DPR and LPR authorities and would focus on building up its armed forces, as well as carrying out military reform. Special attention would be paid to the country's eastern regions, including the Ukrainian parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions,

in terms of economic aid and decentralization. In many respects, it would be a competition between Ukraine (with the West's support) and the unrecognized republics (with Moscow's support) in terms of the effectiveness of governance and the rebuilding of infrastructure. Because of the long-term nature of the 'frozen conflict' scenario, the socio-economic standing of Russia and Ukraine would assume particular importance, both in terms of the ability to allocate sufficient resources to solve problems, as well as the competition between the Ukrainian and Novorossiia concepts.

- *Peaceful solution.* Russian experts believe that this scenario could only be implemented as part of a multi-component solution, which implies: a successful intra-national (inclusive) Ukrainian dialogue; pragmatism in relations between Kiev and Moscow; an easing of the confrontation between Russia and the West; and the start of discussions on the new architecture for European security and Ukraine's status within this. If these items (collectively or individually) are to be fulfilled, there would be an opportunity for a sustainable peace process.

The *peaceful scenario* is possible only if several preconditions are observed by the parties involved, including the abandonment of confrontational rhetoric and acknowledgement of the substantial costs for all players of continuing the conflict. The gradual lifting and ultimate abolition of the United States and EU's anti-Russian sanctions, as well as the West dropping discussions about the legal status of Crimea, could be extremely important steps on the path to peace. In this way, in exchange for ending sanctions and removing Crimea from the agenda (even based on an understanding that the West would be highly unlikely ever to acknowledge officially the take-over of the region), Russia could agree to Ukraine's territorial integrity on the provision of a broad decentralization.

According to Russian experts, the third scenario is the least likely among the three options, due primarily to the lack of a common platform for all the parties involved in the conflict. At present, it is clearly unlikely that all the parameters of this scenario for peace, which can be conditionally regarded as positive, could ever be implemented. Above all, it would require Kiev to constitute the relevant authorities focused on a peaceful resolution of the problem. Secondly, it would require Russia and the West to abandon their confrontational logic. However, the most difficult problem is that even if the main aspects of this scenario were to begin to materialize, Moscow would still need guarantees on Crimea. That is, it would need Crimea's status to be secured in a form that would prevent it from being referred to as Ukrainian territory. At the present time, the West cannot and will not agree to this.

The first, *confrontational scenario*, is undesirable but still probable because the 'hard-liners' remain strong on both sides of the conflict (especially on the Ukrainian side). It could become more realistic if President Poroshenko fails to implement domestic reforms and stabilize the socio-economic and political situation in the country. In this case, he could be tempted to channel social

discontent towards the resumption of the so-called anti-terrorist operation in the Donbass.

Russian experts believe that the '*frozen conflict*' scenario is the most probable one because the warring parties have no more resources to continue the conflict in its current, open form. This option will not bring peace and stability to the region but it could stop military activities, the killing of civilians and create the necessary conditions for rebuilding the region's economy and social institutions.

Alterations in the Russian international course in the post-crisis period will also result in a change of Moscow's regional priorities. In particular, Russia will pay greater attention to its relations with the 'near vicinity,' trying to repair its poor/negative image, to prevent its authority from weakening further in the post-Ukrainian era and to shift political alliances in the post-Soviet territory to its benefit. In parallel, Moscow will try to redesign the current system of Russian-led institutions in the post-Soviet domain – CIS, Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) etc. – which all proved to be ineffective during the Ukrainian crisis.

Eurasian Economic Union

Primary emphasis will be on the economic aspects of integration, including further development of the EEU. A treaty aimed at establishing the EEU was signed on 29 May 2014 (after the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis) by the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, and came into force on 1 January 2015. Treaties seeking Armenia and Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union were signed on 9 October and 23 December 2014, respectively. Armenia's accession treaty came into force on 2 January 2015 and Kyrgyzstan's on 8 May 2015.

The EEU introduced the free movement of goods, capital, services and people and it provides for common transport, agriculture and energy policies, with provisions for a single currency and greater integration in the future. The union operates through supra-national and inter-governmental institutions. The supra-national institutions include the Eurasian Commission (executive body), the Court of the EEU (judicial body) and the Eurasian Development Bank. National governments are generally represented by the Eurasian Commission's Council.

The EEU's creation was the result of a difficult compromise between Vladimir Putin and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the author of the idea of Eurasian economic integration. Where Putin had desired a common parliament, common passport and common currency within the EEU, Nazarbayev remained steadfast in confining the organization to a purely economic union. Kazakhstan (as well as Belarus and Armenia) have repeatedly emphasized that the EEU is a pragmatic means to gain economic benefits, and not any form of meddling in Russia's political actions or following of its international course. According to one Kazakhstan expert, 'We are quite pragmatic about membership, anticipating economic and social dividends. Astana is interested in preferences for the export of energy to Russia and its transit to other countries.'²⁰

The Ukrainian crisis has placed the EEU in a radically different situation. None of the EEU member states recognized Russia's take-over of Crimea, which forced them to emphasize their sovereignty in international politics. Astana, for example, is very mindful of the fact that ethnic Russians still constitute nearly a quarter of Kazakhstan's population, and northern Kazakhstan has a discernible history of secessionist attempts. The Russian economic crisis caused by the slump in oil prices, together with Western sanctions, currently impedes the implementation of the EEU integration projects. For example, trade between the three EEU founding states (Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia) fell by nearly 13 per cent in the first quarter of 2014.²¹

With regard to the future of the EEU, experts have put forward three scenarios:²²

- The first scenario is *optimistic*. Under this option, the EEU eliminates all barriers to trade, and economic co-operation between the member states enters a phase of sustainable development based on the implementation of the EEU Treaty and associated documents. Tajikistan overcomes its border disputes with Kyrgyzstan, brings its legal and technical standards into harmony with the EEU standards and joins the Union in the near future. Other countries like Uzbekistan and Turkey may express their interest in rapprochement with the Union. The EEU's relations with other countries both near and far advance constructively, including through the establishment of free trade areas. By 2025, the EEU emerges as a solid interstate bloc setting the agenda for integration processes in the post-Soviet domain. Economic integration within the EEU creates favourable conditions for the start of a monetary and political union.
- The second option is a *muddling-through* scenario. As a result of divergent goals and interests among member states, the EEU proceeds slowly, giving rise to diverse problems and friction between members, leading to them gradually losing interest in participation. For some time, Russia artificially retains the Union and its governing structures, although with diminishing interest and energy because of its own growing domestic problems. Ultimately, the Union begins to transform into a loose intergovernmental association operating on an explicitly formal basis like the former Eurasian Economic Community.
- The third scenario is clearly *pessimistic*. As Russia is unable to become an attractive economic and political power in Eurasia, and as a result of external pressures/competition from China, EU, the United States and WTO (upon Belarus' and Kazakhstan's accession), non-Russian member states lose their interest in the EEU and it eventually collapses. Putin's plans to make the EEU a new geo-economic and geopolitical pole also collapse.

Russian experts consider the first of these scenarios to be both the most desirable and the most credible one.

Collective Security Treaty Organization

The CSTO, an intergovernmental military alliance which was formed by Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan in 2002 (on the

basis of the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty of 1992), is seen by Moscow as an important instrument of its hard security policy in the post-Soviet domain. Although this organization is based on the principle of collective defence, Moscow and other CSTO member states strongly oppose to any comparisons of this institution with NATO. Russian diplomats and experts prefer to portray the CSTO as a 'new type' of security organization (purely defensive, non-aggressive, inclusive etc.) while NATO is presented as a 'relict of the Cold War' with all the negative attributes like expansionism, aggressiveness, militarism, exclusiveness and so on.²³ Nonetheless, prior to the Ukrainian crisis the Kremlin did not oppose the CSTO's co-operation with NATO on issues such as Afghanistan, combating international terrorism and drug trafficking.²⁴

Accusations that the CSTO was a 'paper tiger' have followed the organization since its foundation, but the claims were particularly relevant following its failure to intervene in the 2010 violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, the most serious security breakdown in the region since the group was formed. Since that time, however, the CSTO has made a number of advances: it has moved forward on the creation of a joint air defence system, joint air forces and rapid reaction troops. Such changes effectively mark the evolution of the organization from exclusive orientation towards collective defence with co-operative defence arrangements. Furthermore, the CSTO was originally designed to protect its members from external aggression rather than internal instability.

The CSTO faces a fresh wave of criticism at a strategically awkward time as the crisis over Ukraine means that Russia is relying more and more on its non-Western allies. Some member states were disappointed with the fact that the CSTO did nothing to prevent the conflict in south-eastern Ukraine. In March 2015, Tajikistan complained that military aid promised to its border guards had been slow to arrive. Central Asian member states are concerned about a potential spill-over effect of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, pointing out that the CSTO has not done enough to counteract or prevent this threat.²⁵

There is also marked difference of opinion among CSTO member states with regard to the organization's priority objectives. For example, the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko believes that the CSTO should concentrate on the soft security challenges:

we can use existing mechanisms of interaction between the CSTO and other special services that can create a barrier to organized crime groups, which are already trying to find loopholes and use the new economic conditions in their criminal purposes.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, suggests a broader agenda: 'We need to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, trans-national organized crime and prevent natural and man-made disasters.'²⁶

Russia is disappointed over Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan's unwillingness to co-operate with the CSTO, given that they are two critical countries for Central Asia's security. Uzbekistan quit the bloc in 2012. Turkmenistan, claiming

neutrality, has never been a member of the CSTO. Organization's Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha stated in interview:

We're not talking about the need to join the CSTO, about giving up their sovereignty. We're only talking about one thing: let's unite the efforts of the special services to jointly fight against common threats, which we're confronting today, let's talk about the possibility of offering aid from the CSTO collective forces in case it's needed. But there has been no response from either Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan.²⁷

Russia's priorities for future CSTO development include:

- Further development of the Collective Defence Forces which consist of Collective Rapid Reaction Forces, Collective Rapid Reaction Forces for Central Asia, Peace-Keeping Forces, Special Operation Forces and a Collective Air Force. Special attention is given to equipping collective forces with unified (Russian-produced) armaments, command, control and communication systems as well as joint training and military exercises.
- Improvement of the crisis management system in the CSTO framework. At the December 2014 Collective Security Council meeting the heads of CSTO member states decided to establish a Crisis Reaction Centre within the organization's secretariat. The centre is designed to monitor conflict-generating processes and to assist in early conflict-prevention as well as conflict management and resolution both inside member states and in their vicinity.
- A complex of measures to be undertaken to meet security threats emanating from the Middle East, including international terrorism, drug-trafficking and illegal migration. More specifically, these measures focus on arming and training Tajik border guards as well as an intensive dialogue with the Afghan central government to stop terrorists and drug-trafficking.
- Among the new, non-traditional security challenges, the CSTO plans to focus on cyber-terrorism and strengthening information security. To cope with such a threat, the CSTO decided to create a Consultative Coordination Centre on Cyber Security.²⁸

Along with the Russian-led institutions in the post-Soviet domain, the Kremlin will highlight the further development of its 'strategic partnership' with China and co-operation with and within non-Western institutions, such as the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO), BRICS, ASEAN, African Union, Islamic Conference Organization etc. Moscow's priorities with regard to the most important multilateral institutions – the SCO and BRICS – deserve consideration at this point.

Shanghai Co-operation Organization

From Moscow's point of view, the role of the SCO, a six-member organization (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) founded in

2001, is of growing significance in terms of both Eurasian economic integration and of security. As the July 2015 SCO summit in Ufa (Russia) demonstrated, this organization has become attractive to other regional powers. For example, the process of India and Pakistan's accession to the organization has been launched. The two countries submitted applications for full membership in September 2014. SCO leaders also adopted a decision granting Belarus observer status. Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia and Nepal have been designated as dialogue partners.²⁹

The heads of the SCO states also signed the Ufa declaration and ratified the strategy of the organization's development up to 2025.³⁰ In addition, they approved a program of member states' co-operation to jointly fight terrorism, separatism and extremism (for the period of 2016–2018).

To further improve the efficiency of the SCO, it should be better co-ordinated with other regional institutions and projects, such as the EEU and the Chinese Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) initiative. It is obvious that fulfilling such a long-term objective will be a multi-stage process and will require that a consolidated view shared by all the SCO member states be developed. It would also be appropriate to use the significant geo-economic potential of the SCO observer and dialogue partner countries to create mechanisms for them to participate in multilateral co-operative projects.

Moscow believes that the SCO is able to constructively contribute in the strengthening of Eurasian security. The key (political) point for the Kremlin is to preserve its non-aligned, non-military nature, because it was designed primarily to address soft rather than hard security challenges and aimed at developing economic and humanitarian co-operation.

According to some accounts,³¹ the SCO is faced with some systemic and institutional challenges:

- There is a difference of opinion among member states with regard to the Chinese initiative to create the SCO Development Bank and Development Fund (Special Account). Moscow believes this is premature, claiming that the BRICS Development Bank should first be properly launched and, secondly, there is no need for another development bank in the region as other options to fund SCO projects are available, including the Eurasian Development Bank (part of the EEU project).³²
- The growing instability in Afghanistan, including the emergence of an ISIL-led zone of influence in this country, with a potential spill-over effect into Central Asia.
- SCO multilateral economic co-operation is lagging behind bilateral formats.

Russian experts³³ believe that, theoretically, two possible scenarios for the SCO's development exist in the near and mid-term future:

- 1 *The moderate scenario* assumes maintenance of the current level and range of co-operation between SCO member states, focusing on institutional development and a slow pace of further enlargement (especially in terms of admission

of new permanent members). Within this scenario, the previously mentioned challenges to the SCO can be mitigated by co-ordinating its activities with the EEU and SREB projects, including banking, finance, transport infrastructure and counter-terrorism strategies.

- 2 *The optimistic scenario* assumes a more radical response to the challenges and threats by further expanding the group of permanent SCO members (in addition to India and Pakistan), establishing a development bank and fund, launching a series of ambitious economic and infrastructure projects and strengthening co-operation in the security sphere. This may lead to making the SCO a powerful regional bloc that could challenge Western geopolitical and geo-economic aspirations in Eurasia.

Obviously, this scenario is based on the assumption that a further convergence between Russia and China within the framework of their strategic partnership will be developed. However, it is unclear whether Beijing will accept Moscow as a co-leader of such a coalition. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether SCO newcomers – India and Pakistan – are ready to consider something more radical than deeper economic and limited security co-operation and to accept strong Sino-Russian leadership in this emerging bloc.

BRICS

Russia's interests and policy priorities in the case of BRICS are described in the document titled 'Concept of participation of the Russian Federation in BRICS'³⁴ prepared by the Foreign Ministry on the eve of the BRICS' Durban summit in March 2013. Moscow's interest in this international grouping is of a both geo-economic and geopolitical nature. Geo-economically, the Kremlin was keen on BRICS' creation and its further development for the following reasons:

- Along with other emerging economies, Russia was (and is) discontent with the global economic and financial system which, the Kremlin believed, was established to the benefit of the 'club' of highly developed countries. It is no coincidence that BRICS has consolidated itself institutionally in the context of the global financial crisis of 2008–2010: its member states strongly believed that the West should be blamed for 'short-sighted' and 'reckless' financial policies that led to the crisis, and that they should act together in this critical situation. Their decision to establish a \$100 billion development bank to finance infrastructure projects and a \$100 billion reserve fund to steady their currency markets was aimed at creating safeguards against new global crises, thus making them less dependent on economic and financial rules imposed on the world by the wealthiest nations.³⁵
- Moreover, the BRICS countries share common economic and financial problems as well as 'the need for large-scale modernization.'³⁶ For example, Brazil and India permanently face serious problems with the stabilization of their currencies, as generally high poverty levels have the consequence that

they are hard-pressed to maintain growth by means of encouraging domestic demand. The Russian rouble has also depreciated considerably since the beginning of 2013, much earlier than when oil prices dropped and the Western sanctions were introduced in 2014. In China's case, the government had been able to ensure exchange rate stability before February 2014 through strict regulatory measures, but since that time, the policy of gradual depreciation of the Yuan has been implemented. According to the World Economic Forum experts, China is now losing another main economic advantage: its cheap labour force. China now places only twenty-ninth in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index, with South Africa lagging behind in fifty-third place, Brazil in fifty-sixth, India in sixtieth and Russia in sixty-fourth position.³⁷ In the Kremlin's view, these structural economic problems could be solved by joint efforts. The previously mentioned Foreign Ministry's document contained an impressive list of common BRICS activities including – alongside trade and financial issues – co-operation in areas such as industry, energy, agriculture, telecommunications and information technologies, research, healthcare, higher education and culture.³⁸

- Moscow believes that BRICS countries have immense potential not only to solve existing problems but also to ensure their sustainable and prosperous socio-economic development. In the aftermath of the September 2013 G20 summit in St. Petersburg (where BRICS countries had a meeting on the margins) Putin announced, as he has done on numerous prior occasions, that 'BRICS is the world's biggest market and accounts for 40 (per cent) of the world's population – 2.9 billion people,' thereby indicating that whenever BRICS speaks, the world really should listen.³⁹ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stated that 2013 is the first year in which emerging markets will account for more than half of world GDP on purchasing power parity. Just 13 years ago, they accounted for less than a third. According to another account, China is the first 'mega-trader' since colonial Britain. In the area of employment, BRICS countries are far ahead of many other nations. The McKinsey Global Institute says that while emerging economies added 900 million non-farm jobs between 1980 and 2010, the advanced economies added just 160 million.⁴⁰ In this situation, it is easy to see where Russia's preferences lie.

Few experts doubt that the BRICS nations are rapidly developing countries (perhaps with the exception of Russia in the post-Crimea era). However, to see BRICS solely through the lens of economic growth is to miss the point. As many analysts believe, they might also represent the main poles of the emerging multi-polar world. For example, Fyodor Lukyanov, authoritative columnist and President of the Council on Foreign & Defence Policies, the Russian influential think-tank, emphasizes that 'BRICS is primarily a political group that emerged in response to the obvious need for a more diverse and less Western-oriented global political structure.'⁴¹ The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has also repeatedly noted that, for Russia, BRICS is first and foremost a geopolitical association.⁴²

There are several reasons for Russia's growing geopolitical interest in BRICS:

- It is becoming increasingly clear to emerging powers that the structure of global institutions is inadequate for the realities of the twenty-first century, especially while any genuine plans to reform these institutions remain on the drawing board. It should be noted that while these five very different countries do not agree on everything, they are, however, united in their dissatisfaction with their status in the world, even if their reasons for this frustration are different and potentially even incompatible.⁴³ Existing political structures were built around the bipolar world of the Cold War and have remained virtually unchanged since that time. The BRICS member states rightly question the legitimacy of the existing system and want a global political structure that truly reflects the multipolar world order that is gradually taking shape nowadays. This is why, for example, all the BRICS nations favour reform of the UN Security Council because the current system is seen as a relic of the 1945 balance of power. However, these countries understand that it is difficult to implement any such reform and that all the structural and procedural changes need to be made gradually and in a cautious manner. On the other hand, the BRICS countries underline that the proposed UN reform should not undermine the role of this organization. On the contrary, one of the main BRICS' priorities is 'to preserve and strengthen the UN Security Council's role as a body bearing the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.'⁴⁴
- It is also clear for the five BRICS nations that current global problems demand entirely new approaches. They believe that the West has monopolized the global debate and, by doing this, it has impeded a search for fresh ideas and effective solutions that could result from more inclusive discussions. The BRICS countries were especially unhappy about the frequent use of military force by the United States and its NATO allies in the post-Cold war era. The Russian strategic document on BRICS underlines the need 'to prevent the use of the UN, and first of all the Security Council, to cover up the course of removing undesirable regimes and imposing unilateral solutions to conflict situations, including those based on the use of force.'⁴⁵
- Furthermore, all of the BRICS countries have found it very difficult to increase their influence on the world stage within existing institutions, and they have been looking for ways to strengthen their geopolitical positions by forming a new global political-economic structure. The fact that they represent different parts of the world lends even more weight to their aspirations.
- BRICS is a particularly useful concept for Russia, which has struggled since 1991 to find a stable identity in the global political arena. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was reduced to the level of regional power. According to Lukyanov, 'The notion of multi-polarity has shaped Russian foreign policy horizon since the mid-1990s, when it became clear that Russian integration into the Western system as an equal partner was not an option.'⁴⁶ The concept of BRICS offered Russia a way to reassert its global

aspirations and to draw attention to its economic progress. Moreover, BRICS allowed Russia to do this in a non-confrontational way, albeit the United States remains unconvinced that the group is not specifically directed against anyone and still perceives BRICS as a threat to its power.

- Russia also believes that BRICS can be helpful in promoting international security co-operation, more specifically in areas such as conflict resolution, non-proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction, combating international terrorism, drug trafficking, piracy, money laundering, illegal migration etc. Moscow favours the creation of joint institutions to coordinate BRICS' activities in the field of international security.⁴⁷

Opposition voices are marginal in the Russian expert community. According to some sceptics, the BRICS member states do not have a shared history and belong to different civilizations. They are not tied together by common long-term interests, but are only united through the criteria of experiencing relatively rapid economic growth. Differences between members in levels of economic, social, scientific and educational development are too great. There are even some conflicts between member states. 'The coming-together of the BRICS states has a (merely) symbolic political character. The disagreements and the different directions of the states interfere with the attempts to achieve unity inside the grouping. The group of BRICS states holds no perspective.'⁴⁸

Russian strategists, however, disregard such scepticism and plan to give a high priority of BRICS in Moscow's foreign policy for the foreseeable future. The Kremlin's strategic vision of BRICS' priorities is clearly outlined in Russia's presidency program for 2015–2016. According to this document, Moscow's long-term objective with regards to BRICS is its gradual transformation from

a dialogue forum and a tool for co-ordinating positions on a limited range of issues into a full-scale mechanism for strategic and day-to-day cooperation on key issues of world politics and the global economy ... All this is intended to raise BRICS to the level of an important element of the global governance system in the 21st century.⁴⁹

More specific objectives include:

- to strengthen BRICS' international positions and, on this basis, to solidify Russia's political and economic position in the international arena;
- to use BRICS for solving the most pressing international problems which represent a priority for Russia and its BRICS partners, such as regional conflicts, international terrorism, drug trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction etc.;
- to reform the international monetary and financial system, primarily the IMF;
- to further develop multilateral financial co-operation within the framework of BRICS, including the full launch of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement of BRICS countries;

- to promote intra-BRICS co-operation in new areas, such as parliamentary affairs, culture, information and youth issues;
- to further institutionalize BRICS by creating respective institutions and mechanisms as well as by improving the reporting process for previous commitments assumed by member states.⁵⁰

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

At present, Moscow's attitude to the OSCE is somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, the Kremlin is quite critical about the role of this organization in conflict prevention, management and resolution, including the Georgian (2008) and Ukrainian (2014) crises. Russian analysts believe that the OSCE was often too slow and indecisive, its capacities and mandates were too limited and its implementation process was inefficient. With regard to the conflict in the Ukrainian south-east, Moscow frequently accuses the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of being biased (in favour of Kiev). The Kremlin has also dropped (at least for a time) any idea of making the OSCE a backbone of future European security architecture (as President Dmitry Medvedev promoted in his 2009 draft of a European Security Treaty). Instead, Moscow has more pragmatic and short-term plans to utilise the OSCE for solving existing problems, including the conflict in and around Ukraine.

However, on the other hand, the Kremlin has no interest in any increased marginalization of the OSCE, given that it remains the only pan-European institution where Russia acts on equal footing and the only authoritative conflict management mechanism available to Moscow for the time being. Given the deep crisis in relations between Russia and the two most powerful security structures in Europe – the EU and NATO – following the Ukraine crisis, it seems unlikely that any fully-fledged partnership will be formed with them in the mid-term perspective.

Russian experts suggest a number of improvements to revive the OSCE and secure its key role in the European security system:⁵¹

- To develop a code of conduct for OSCE member states in the areas they define as the most problematic.
- To adopt an OSCE Charter (constituent document), which could help transform the organization from a regional arrangement into a full-fledged, treaty-based regional organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. The Charter would reaffirm, in a legally binding form, *the modus operandi* of the OSCE, its structures and institutions, as it has been established to date by relevant decisions of the OSCE decision-making bodies.
- To approve a Convention on the International Legal Personality, Legal Capacity and Privileges and Immunities of the OSCE that was finalized in 2007 but has not been signed to date.
- To expand the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre's powers regarding conflict monitoring and early conflict prevention.

- To resume the pan-European dialogue on conventional arms control in the framework of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation.
- To revive discussions within the OSCE on the modernization of the Vienna Document on confidence and security-building measures.

Russia's relations with the West

Russia's relations with the West and its major institutions (EU and NATO) will be redefined in a more realistic and pragmatic way, with the aim of making the country less dependent on oil and gas exports to the West, Western technologies and investment imports. In the near future, Russia's co-operation with the West (especially with the United States and NATO) will be reduced to the minimum – to the areas where co-operation is crucial and mutually beneficial for these organisations (non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, fighting international terrorism and transnational organized crime, mitigation of global climate change etc.).

United States–Russia

Since the Kremlin believes that the United States inspired the anti-Yanukovich coup d'état in February 2014 and continues to support the anti-Russian/nationalistic regime in Kiev, Moscow does not see Washington as a potential partner in solving the Ukrainian crisis and prefers European (Franco-German) mediation. Moreover, the Kremlin perceives the United States to be the main force behind anti-Russian sanctions and NATO's military build-up on Russia's western borders. Globally, the United States is seen as an expansionist and militaristic power which claims its right to the unilateral use of force around the world to defend its own national interests.

For these reasons, Moscow does not believe that Washington can be a reliable international partner in the foreseeable future. It prefers to focus on a limited co-operative agenda, including issues such as the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (e.g. the 2013 agreement on Syrian chemical weapons or the recent Iranian nuclear program deal), fighting international terrorism and drug trafficking in selected countries and regions (primarily in the Middle East), climate change mitigation (especially in the Arctic), space exploration and co-operation in the humanitarian/cultural spheres.⁵² Russian experts are quite pessimistic about the future of US–Russian relations whatever the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential elections is because, regardless of whether they are Democratic or Republican, the candidates are each essentially anti-Russian/assertive.

At the same time, Moscow seeks to demonstrate its openness and readiness to a dialogue with the United States, assuming the latter is serious about co-operation with Russia and respectful to its interests.

NATO–Russia

In the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, relations between NATO and Russia have suffered the most. Although the NATO Information Office in Moscow has not

been closed down, essentially all other forms of co-operation between the North Atlantic alliance and Russia have stopped.

Russian politicians and experts fear that the Ukrainian crisis could prevent NATO's transformation from a Cold War-type of military-political alliance into a political-military institution that could adequately meet new, non-traditional security challenges. They believe that NATO is currently improperly designed for dealing with soft security challenges, such as international terrorism, transnational crime, illegal migration, search and rescue operations, natural and man-made catastrophes etc. Russian strategists and military analysts are also concerned about the return of the 'old agenda' in NATO–Russian relations, which was traditionally focused on containing one another in Europe. The recent intensification of NATO's military activities in Eastern and Northern Europe is interpreted, on the one hand, as evidence of just such a negative trend and, on the other, as an end to the 1997 NATO–Russia charter.

In contrast with Moscow's future relations with the United States and EU, Russian analysts are quite pessimistic about prospects for co-operation with NATO. They see no possibility for co-operation with this bloc (even in selected/limited areas) and make no suggestions to this end. They also do not see any role for NATO in the resolution of the Ukrainian conflict. On the contrary, NATO is seen as one of the main trouble-makers in Europe and as a threat to Russia's security.

The Russian IR mainstream believes that a new system of Euro–Atlantic security can be efficient if it is inclusive, indivisible and based on the fundamental interests of all the nations in our region. And NATO is not a proper institution on which to base any such security system.⁵³

EU–Russia

Both the Russian decision-makers and experts believe that relations between Moscow and Brussels are at an impasse. Even prior to the Ukrainian crisis there was very little progress in the implementation of the 2005 EU–Russian agreement on four common spaces. In many ways, the EU and Russia have been losing common ground, not gaining it, and institutional deficit was one reason behind their poor performance. Brussels and Moscow failed to sign a new partnership agreement to replace the old one that expired long before (2007). They were unable to move to a visa-free regime between Russia and the Schengen zone, and they were unable to reconcile their differences on the EU 'third energy package.' Even on less controversial matters, such as co-operation in research, education, environment protection or transportation, progress was quite modest. The Ukrainian crisis has finally derailed the dialogue between Moscow and Brussels and led to open confrontation between them.

At the same time, the Russian expert community hopes that the relationship between Russia and the EU will stabilize, and this notion is supported by objective factors, such as geographical proximity, history, a high level of economic interdependence (especially in the energy sector), cultural links and last but not

least, a strong institutional environment that has been created between Russia and the EU over the last two decades. The main question for Russian analysts is at what level this stabilization will take place? And what will the 'common denominator' of the relationship prove to be?

Russian specialists⁵⁴ on EU–Russian relations believe that the following prerequisites should be observed in order to resume the dialogue between Brussels and Moscow:

- Isolation of Moscow does not serve the interests of either the EU or Russia. The more Russia is integrated into the global economy and the global processes of managing it, the more Moscow will behave in a responsible and predictable way. Likewise, a weak and uncompetitive Russia, which would inevitably be perceived as a threat to Europe's security, is not in the EU's long-term interests.
- The differences between the EU and Russia must be taken into account. While Russia is a state-type participant on the international stage (albeit not a 'classical' one, being a multinational rather than a nation-state), the EU is a supranational body whose foreign policies cannot be reduced to a simple sum of individual member states' foreign policies. The EU is not a superpower in the traditional sense, and its responses and reactions to external challenges are radically different from those of the traditional 'great powers.' At the same time, the EU consists of individual states that each have their own national interests that may not necessarily coincide with others. Harmonization of different national interests within the EU is an extremely complicated process, making EU foreign policy decision-making a difficult process, especially with reference to Russia. Both the EU and Russia should not only respect each other's interests but also take differences in their politics and decision-making systems into serious consideration. In particular, Russia should build its relations with the EU as a whole, as well as with its individual member states.
- Converging rather than diverging interests should have central focus, in an aim to develop realistic, not wishful, thinking. The current situation within EU–Russian relations requires a realistic approach. Neither side should rely on inflated expectations, as these will inevitably lead to large-scale disappointment. There is no sense in putting too much emphasis on simply discussing issues, especially where there is a crisis of trust and differences in values between the two sides; it is more sensible to identify and focus on those areas where fruitful joint work is really important and, at the same time, credible and possible.
- A revival of the Partnership for Modernization program. The PfM project was launched as a joint EU–Russia initiative in 2010. This partnership included a wide range of areas for co-operation – from expanding opportunities for investment in Russia's key economic sectors that drive growth and innovation, promoting small- and medium-sized enterprises and enhancing co-operation in areas of innovation, research and development, to

strengthening the fight against corruption and promoting people-to-people contact. Although progress in the PfM implementation has been quite modest, and subsequently stalled with the introduction of the EU sanctions in 2014, this project still remains important because it could be helpful in bringing the Russian economic, technical, environmental, administrative and legal standards up to EU ones and could encompass further development of an interdependency mechanism.

- Optimization of the visa regime. Russia and the EU reached an agreement at their 2012 December Summit to move towards a visa-free regime. This is crucial for the successful implementation of one of the core EU and Russian principles/values – the freedom of movement of people in Europe. Talks on the visa-free regime, however, were frozen even before the Ukrainian crisis because of differences of opinion among the partners on various political and technical issues.

In the current situation, it is understandable that real progress in this area is impossible. At the present time, it is more important to prevent repercussions from the Ukrainian crisis from impacting on the existing visa regime rather than to launch a new round of visa-free talks. Nevertheless, there would be no purpose served in taking this matter completely off the agenda: in due time, with the normalization of the situation in and around Ukraine, EU–Russian negotiations on this issue should be resumed.

- The fight against international terrorism and transnational organized crime. These negative phenomena have become highly dangerous systematic and ubiquitous threats to both the EU and Russia. The need for EU–Russia co-operation in these areas has been actualized in the context of growing threats, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda activities, as well as intensified terrorist and drug trafficking from the Middle East to the European countries and Russia. In January 2014, Russia and the EU adopted a Joint EU–Russia Statement on Combating Terrorism, in which they mapped out strategic areas of co-operation. It would make sense to specify joint steps and time-frames for both on the basis of this document.
- A change in focus from ‘grand’ to ‘low’ politics. In light of the current tense relations between Brussels and Moscow, it is relevant to turn the spotlight onto other levels of co-operation: people-to-people, company-to-company, university-to-university, region-to-region, municipality-to-municipality contacts. For example, it could feasibly be a good idea to revive projects that were popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as Euroregions and city-twinning.⁵⁵
- To overcome the institutional deficit in Europe. The Ukrainian crisis revealed a striking institutional deficit in Europe: none of the existing institutions – the NATO–Russia Council, EU, Council of Europe, UN Security Council – were able to play any significant role in preventing, downscaling or even managing the crisis. As previously mentioned, the OSCE became involved, but

only in a limited way and only at a later stage of the conflict. The Ukrainian crisis has paralyzed or seriously hampered other sub-regional, multilateral institutions – the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (BSEC), Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and even institutions that serve the regions located quite far from Ukraine – the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Arctic Council.

It is clearly advisable and desirable that the EU and Russia should each take the lead in reviving regional and sub-regional institutions, and to use them in solving the Ukrainian crisis and encouraging international co-operation on all levels available. As previously stated, Moscow believes that the OSCE should play a key role in reinstalling and reforming the European institutional infrastructure. However, other regional and sub-regional institutions are important as well.

It should be noted that, among the Western power-structures, Moscow perceives the EU to be the most preferable and ‘adequate’ international partner, while the United States and NATO are considered to be less reliable and relevant interlocutors. However, in Russia’s perception and to its own displeasure, the EU is not a completely independent strategic player because it followed the United States anti-Russian course in the case of the Ukrainian crisis. The Kremlin hopes that the EU will realize at some point that the pro-American and anti-Russian policies are detrimental to the EU’s own interests and that the EU will return to the strategy of co-operation and partnership with Russia.

Conclusion

The main change that the Ukrainian crisis has brought about within Russia’s international strategies is not territorial (such as the reintegration of Crimea into Russia and the turmoil in the south-east part of the country), but far more a strategic and mental one. Russia has finally shifted away from any thought or project to integrate into the West and become part of the Euro–Atlantic economic and security systems. Instead, it has retreated to its ‘home base’/heartland in Eurasia and has markedly raised the priority of co-operation with non-Western countries (especially with China). In a certain sense, an answer to the question ‘What should be done?’ has been partially found: Russia has turned its back on the West and now looks forward to co-operation with the East.

This dramatic shift in Moscow’s foreign policy priorities is reflected in Russia’s new military and maritime doctrines. The Kremlin is also updating its national security, information and foreign policy doctrines. Conceptually, Moscow is trying to integrate its soft and hard power policies into a ‘smart power’ strategy to adequately meet internal and external challenges. One further conceptual shift in Russian foreign policy thinking is a return to a principle of peaceful coexistence (albeit on a different, non-Marxist-Leninist philosophical basis).

In seeking realignment of its foreign policies, the Kremlin is trying to play new and different games with international institutions such as BRICS, SCO, EEU and CSTO. From the Russian point of view, these players can have partly competitive, partly complementary roles. Sometimes they can draw resources from

the same pools (for instance, a BRICS development bank or a prospective SCO development bank), but they also have somewhat different agendas.

A notable example here is the fact that Russian policies towards and within BRICS represent a combination of ideational and material motives. On the one hand, BRICS is important for the Kremlin in terms of seeking status: the Kremlin believes that by joining forces with other major states, it will be easier for Russia to return to and maintain its status of great power, to shape the future world order and to make the West (particularly the United States) abide by the rules of that order. On the other hand, Moscow values its economic and strategic partnerships with the BRICS states which, if only because of relevant size, are important for Russia's well-being and for counter-balancing the West in the global geopolitical game. For Russia, BRICS mainly appears to represent a vehicle for global, normative transformation, while other organizations (EEU, SCO, CSTO) are regional in scope and more practical in their outlook.

As far as the 'Western dimension' of Russian foreign policy strategy is concerned, Moscow, on the one hand, plans to reduce its dependence on exports of energy products to Europe and the importing of Western technologies and consumer goods, as well as to limit its co-operation with the United States and EU to specific areas. However, on the other hand, Russian strategists believe that Russia should share an interest with the West in halting and reversing the slide towards mutual confrontation; Russia and the West should bridge the gap that divides them, enhance predictability and develop effective channels for co-operation (or at least minimize confrontation). In particular, the strategists believe that co-operation is possible in selected areas, such as:

- measures to avoid military escalation in south-east Ukraine;
- support for Ukraine to avoid economic collapse;
- humanitarian assistance and reconstruction support for war-damaged areas in Ukraine;
- dialogue on the future of the European security order (with the OSCE as a backbone of a new security architecture);
- co-operation on a number of global and regional challenges (non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, fighting international terrorism, transnational organized crime, illegal migration, piracy and global climate change mitigation etc.).

Russian experts suggest that the level and focus of co-operation with European countries should be changed, and specifically, to move it from government-to-government to the sub-national and non-governmental tiers, from a hierarchical/vertical to horizontal/networking type of interaction. This could be helpful for securing and further developing the interdependency mechanism that has emerged over the last two decades and is now being placed under considerable stress.

The expert/academic community also recommends that the primary focus should not be on formalized multilateral institutions; instead, priority should be given to flexible international regimes that are better designed to survive turbulent times.

In general, the Russian IR mainstream is (cautiously) optimistic with regard to the future of Russia's international standing. Russian analysts believe that Western sanctions that were initially pursued are and will be counterproductive to those intentions, and that the Russian economy will eventually grow stronger as a result of self-reliance and policies of import-substitution. They also believe that Moscow can avoid international isolation by developing its links to non-Western countries and institutions. In conclusion, the Ukrainian crisis did not destroy completely but simply delayed Moscow's geopolitical project of building a multipolar world where Russia could categorically take its rightful place.

Notes

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5 A squeezed country

Ukraine between Europe and Eurasia

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Ukraine’s development since its proclamation of independence in 1991 has been driven by a strategy of geopolitical oscillations between two ‘vectors’: the European Union (EU) and Russia. The government that came to power as a result of the Maidan revolution of 2014 followed Western advice to treat the two ‘vectors’ as mutually incompatible. Petro Poroshenko’s pro-European stance following the 2014 ‘Maidan revolution’ has led to decisions that are driving Ukraine away from Russia. Ukraine’s celebrated (and much criticized) multi-vectorism has finally given way to a one-sided orientation towards the West. However, the economic downturn and higher inflation, coupled with the European Union’s refusal to entertain Ukraine’s EU membership bid, have raised doubts about the usefulness of alienating Russia for the purpose of closer European Union integration. Until the violent ousting of President Yanukovich, Ukraine still had some space for tactical manoeuvring so that it could simultaneously benefit from the development of trade relations with Russia and the EU. This possibility has now been closed for the foreseeable future. There has been no good reason for such a turn of events beyond the West’s geopolitical, Cold War reasoning that historically views Russia as an enemy. One good example of the Cold War guard that has maintained this Russophobic attitude since the last days of World War II is the Ukrainian diaspora to the West. This article examines the causes behind the collapse of Ukraine’s multi-vectorism and the transformation of what could have been mutually compatible projects of European and Eurasian regional integration into a contest for regional dominance, with Ukraine becoming a victim in the tug-of-war between Russia and the West.

A split country

The need to balance between regional and global and between the old and new centres of power in the world imposes particular demands on the foreign policies of newly independent states. Often these countries attempt to go beyond the politics of alliances, and head in the direction of the opposite – the politics of the impartial and even engagement of foreign partners. For more than 20 years, Ukraine attempted just that, seeking to build mutually beneficial relationships with all partners, whether east and west, north and south. It was assumed that

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