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**EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE  
FROM THE RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract:**

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev launched the concept of “European security architecture” in June 2008, in Berlin. Since then, Russia has been intensively lobbying in favour of this initiative. The Russian President has developed and promoted the idea further in speeches in Evian, in October 2008 and in Helsinki, in April 2009.

The goal of Medvedev’s plan remains the postulate of equal security for all, which, if implemented, would mean that no actions that might be perceived as threatening the security of others would be allowed. As a consequence, decisions such as the enlargement of NATO would have to be negotiated by the European states with Russia.

The actual short-term objectives behind Russia’s proposal are to stop NATO enlargement and to open a debate on European security. The long-term objectives are to loosen trans-Atlantic ties, incapacitate NATO and grant Moscow a de facto right to veto decisions concerning European security.

Initial reactions from the European states show that Russia may succeed in achieving these short-term objectives. While a complete revision of the existing European security system is unlikely to happen, Moscow may also succeed in undermining the USA’s influence in Europe and deepen the existing divisions among the European states in the domain of security (in other words, the divisions between those countries which co-operate more closely with the USA and those which have been seeking agreement with Russia).

*Key words:*

*security, NATO, european security architecture, Russia, consequence, implemented*

**1. Introduction**

The call of the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, to a new European security architecture represents one of the most remarkable initiative of the Russian diplomatic service in the recent years. Some critics consider that Russia’s attempt to divide the West is unsuccessful and insubstantial, but other analysts appreciate the visionary spirit of Kremlin regarding the 21<sup>st</sup> century security strategy, taking into account the recent tensions of Europe.

The President’s initiative may be rather considered as a deviation from the post Soviet period of foreign policy. The Russian President’s project represents Russia’s vision as far as the Euro-Atlantic and European security is concerned. The notion of a new European security architecture is based on the idea that Russia’s influence is of a preventive nature, thus reflecting the wish to play an important part at a regional and global level.

The foreign policy during Boris Yeltsin’s and Vladimir Putin’s offices did not bring to Russia a leading position in the world hierarchy, the suggestions regarding the global issues being inconclusive.

Russia’s attitude change took place gradually, in the context of some domestic and foreign factors: unpopularity of Bush administration, energy price increase, Vladimir Putin’s power consolidation, and the evasive answers of NATO member states as far as the enlargement of the organization was concerned. The time chosen for this proposal was not

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incidental. Russia could assume in the end a more active part in the international relations, and the great powers and the small states had to obey its interests.

The present paper attempts to reach certain aspects, synthesized as follows:

- What is hidden behind the Russian President's initiative? *Despite an active foreign policy, Russia's reasons are less obvious.* What can be obtained by promoting the new security architecture? Which is the end of this initiative?
- Which is the content of Russia's proposals? *The concept proposed by President Medvedev is presented in an extreme vague manner.* May Russia have a well established plan or, these proposals merely reflect the tense relations between Moscow and the West, particularly with USA?
- Are the disparities of the present architecture real? *The Euro-Atlantic security environment has been significantly damaged recently, being for NATO, OSCE or NATO Council – Russia still an unsolved problem.* Shall the newly created security environment be more stable, where security is equal and undividable?
- What should be Europe's reaction? *Even if the idea of a present ineffective security system were accepted, the cooperation relations with Russia would not record a major change.* Would Russia be acknowledged as an important position within the European security system, taking into account the fact that Russia has often had a conflict of interests with the Western World?

## **2. Redefining the European space**

The security concept proposes a redefinition of Europe by including Russia, its interests. After the end of the Cold War, Russia has been permanently excluded from decision making. During Boris Yeltsin's office, the political instability, the economic and social crisis and the image of problematic state outside its borders have considerably diminished the influence of Russia. This aspect has been much modified during Vladimir Putin's office, but, after the confrontations from Georgia, Russia's image has worsened.

The European Union and NATO have dominated the post Cold War period. The European Union has assumed a normative monopoly, as well as a politic and economic one, for everything that is European, in the same way as NATO who has imposed in the security and military field. Being no member of any of the organizations, Russia tried to create her own identity. The strategic partnership with the European Union as well as the participation within the Council NATO – Russia offered a formal recognition. Despite the fact, Russia has not been integrated into the European space. Russia belongs to a farther era of Europe, from the time of the great powers (Russia, France, Germany and Great Britain). The acceleration of European integration over the past 20 years has left it behind, even more of an outsider than countries such as Turkey, a member of NATO for more than half a century.

President Medvedev speech on 5 June 2008, from Berlin, before the conflict in Georgia points to the fact that Moscow has already had in view to revise the European security system in order to correspond to its own interests. First of all, the American influence on the European continent shall be limited. Medvedev has stated that the present European architecture is marked by an ideology inherited from the past, and NATO does not justify its existence. The Russian President even proposed to be called for a summit with the participation of all European states, who should withdraw previously from any alliance or group.

## **3. Divide and scatter - a slogan of the Russian foreign policy**

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Moscow's policy has in view to exploit divisions within the Western alliance - between the USA and Europe, and amongst the Europeans themselves. Russia's proposal followed after the Bucharest NATO summit in May 2008, saw serious discussions within the alliance which was not a mere coincidence. In the end, Georgia and Ukraine were proposed an eventual Membership Action Plan status. NATO's weaknesses and division impression before Russia's pressure were obvious.

The Russian initiative was a natural response to European disarray. The Bucharest summit highlighted the fissures within the Western alliance on Russia policy. Some member-states, notably Germany and France, believed that Russia had been pushed too far, and in the meantime they stated that the enlargement of the North-Atlantic Organization had reached its safety limits.

### **4. Russia – between image and power projection**

Medvedev's proposal is also an attempt to change Western perception about Russia and its inability to promote a visionary foreign policy. Putin – Medvedev regime has always paid special attention to the international image of Russia. The idea of security architecture should emphasize the influence of Russia.

The most important aspect is the intention of Moscow to create a context that would legitimize the indirect control over the former Soviet Union, by maintaining more and more often the notion of "privileged sphere of interests". While the Russian politicians cannot think of a new Soviet Union, they are in the meantime willing to restore the Russian hegemony in its neighborhood. The present Euro-Atlantic security system, dominated by USA and NATO represent an obstacle. With all its imperfections this system has been used to promote the Western interests and values on the territories of the former Soviet Union. As such, the fact that Moscow combats its legitimacy is not surprising.

The end is not represented by efficient European security architecture, but by an environment that would ease or, at least, would tolerate Russia's influence. Moscow aspires to an arrangement that would consolidate its position as the "regional superpower" in the former Soviet Union space, would bring it to the decisions table and finally, its status as a great power on a par with the USA and the European states would be recognized.

### **5. Many details, little substance**

The new security concept presented by President Medvedev within his speech in Berlin [1] elicited little attention from Europe. But his speech within the World Policy Forum from Evian in October 2008 attracted the European opinion. By that time, Russia's relations with the West, particularly with the USA had reached a twenty year low following the Georgia conflict.

The biggest difference between Russian President's Evian statement and his Berlin speech was the shift from the European to the Euro-Atlantic space. Although he noticed Washington's alleged complicity in the Georgia conflict there was now an implicit understanding that the USA could not be excluded from any revised security architecture. The Russian initiative has turned quickly from a regional level into a Euro-Atlantic one. By using the "Euro-Atlantic" term, President Medvedev highlighted issues that extended beyond the European space, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism. It is also important the fact that he invited all Euro-Atlantic organizations to take part in a European security conference.

The Evian speech, although rich in details about the Russia's policy, can be characterized as thin on substance. The need of a new European security treaty determined Medvedev to propose [2]:

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- respect for the basic principles provided in United Nations Charter (sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the states) regarding the security systems and the inter – governmental relations in the Euro-Atlantic space;
- “a common approach regarding the prevention and diplomatic settlement of the conflicts within the Euro-Atlantic space”;
- guarantee of an “equal security”, based on the three “no”: the own security shall not be based on another state behalf, “no actions of the military coalitions and alliances shall be permitted, actions that would undermine the unity of the common security space” and “there shall be created no military alliance that might threaten the security of the other parties to the treaty (proposed by Russia)”;
- “no state or international organization can have exclusive rights in the maintenance of peace and stability in Europe”;
- “control parameters of weapons and limitations in the defense industry, as well as “some new procedures of cooperation and mechanisms in the case of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and drug traffic.”

These proposals contain little new, all of them being specified in the numerous statements of the Foreign Ministry Affairs from the time of Boris Yeltsin’s office. The notion of “Helsinki-plus” or “Helsinki II” treaty include essential ideas, but thin substance, such as “the global multipolar order for the 21st century”, a Moscow-Beijing-New Delhi axis, and the Brazil-Russia-India –China one.[3] President Medvedev emphasized the importance of the military issues, security – hard (that should play a prominent part) and did not emphasize the understanding of the current security environment. The assumption that security is fundamentally about political and military power reflects a culture dating back more than three hundred years, one that viewed soft security (political and human) as being unessential.

### **6. “Accepting” the existing security environment**

The Russian President’s initiative has also revealed Moscow's sensitivity to international changes. The impacts of the global financial crisis and Barack Obama's election have radically changed the external context of Russian policy making. The anti-American and anti-NATO tone is no longer accepted. This aspect was already emphasized at Evian, by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy: “Our American friends and allies have to take part in the dialogue on security subjects at the Euro-Atlantic level”. The French President urged Russia to engage more closely in existing institutions and mechanisms, such as the NATO-Russia Council and the EU's Security and Defense Policy. [4]

As a consequence, in April 2009, immediately after the G-20 Summit of London, The Russian President recognized that NATO, being the most powerful political and military organization of the world should play an important part in any European or global security system. The latest position of Russia is to include all the Euro-Atlantic states, regional and international organizations and all the states belonging to these organizations. The proposal of adopting a new Helsinki – type treaty was abandoned, as the original principles and instruments of Helsinki should be adapted to the new requirements of the 21st century.

### **7. Russia’s arguments for the security environment transformation**

It has become fashionable to blame Western countries, above all the USA, for the deterioration in the Euro-Atlantic security environment. They are accused of rubbing Russia's nose in the dirt, most notably by enlarging NATO eastwards to include most of Central and Eastern Europe.

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Actions such as the support given in Georgia and Ukraine, including Poland and the Czech Republic in the Missile Defense Plans have generated considerable resentment in Moscow. The current European security architecture, centered on institutions such as NATO and the OSCE, determined the aggravation of the existing tensions to the point of crisis.

It is obvious that in the past twenty years, mistakes have been made as for the relations between the West and Russia, and NATO and OSCE represent a part of these issues. "Helsinki Final Act" signed in 1975 was meant to be the work frame for improving the relations between the West and the Communist block. But this agreement was most of it avoided, and concepts such as "equal and indivisible security" and common values, became, most of the times, irrelevant.

The current security architecture may be considered ineffective for more reasons. It cannot stop conflicts, it creates insecurity feelings, and the Western countries take advantage by promoting national or common interests (NATO). It should be underlined that the international organizations are only as good as their constituent states. Despite the considerable advances in multilateral diplomacy since the Second World War, it is the great powers, not multilateral institutions, which dominate international affairs. Revising the Euro-Atlantic security policy cannot give a solution to the issues identified by President Medvedev. As Russia and others have demonstrated, when the problem of its own security is the case, the great powers will not always abide by international law, they will not necessarily respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states, they will use force as an instrument of foreign policy, they will ensure their security at the expense of others and they will pursue their national interests not taking into account the interests of others.

### **8. Russia vs. NATO and OSCE**

The North-Atlantic alliance has tried to reorient itself after the Cold War and, in certain respects it was successful. It has changed from an alliance countering the Soviet threat into an organization that has promoted stability, democracy and the development of societies of Central and Eastern Europe. There can be little doubt about the fact that the situation of these countries would have been far worse if they had been left in the "buffer zone" they were.

In the meantime, NATO has tried to strengthen the cooperation with Russia. In 1990, Russia was included in the Partnership for Peace, in 1997 Moscow participated in the NATO consultations for the first time, and in 2002 the creation of the NATO-Russia Council established mechanisms for joint decision making in the security field.

However, in the Moscow perception, NATO is still an instrument against Russia, the burden of history being too heavy. Although there has been a modest cooperation within the Russia – NATO Council, the Russian politicians continue to regard the alliance with hostility.

As for the OSCE, things are totally different. In the 1990's, OSCE was Russia's favorite organization. Not only was Russia a full member, but it enjoyed the veto power. The OSCE became for Russia an alternative to NATO because it did not impinge on the prerogatives of the great power.

The Russia – OSCE relations changed after the 1999 Summit in Istanbul, because OSCE condemned Russia for the Chechen war. Since that time, the organization has begun to exert a more powerful influence, and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has assumed the important part of monitoring and evaluation of elections in the Central and Eastern Europe (including Russia). Moscow disliked the idea considering it an infringement of sovereignty.

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As for the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe it is obvious that there is room for improvements or, more precisely for modernization taking into account the changes on the European map since the fall of the USSR. The present version of the treaty restricts Russia from moving troops to the south, where the main threats to the state security lie. After the ratification and modernization of the initial treaty, NATO and Russia had a dispute related to the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Moldova. The issue thus created made Russia suspend its participation in the treaty.

When the Collective Security Treaty Organization was established in 2002 (CSTO) Russia could gather around it allies from the former Soviet Union: Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Although this alliance does not possess a considerable military force, its most powerful effect is that “Russia is not without friends”, and it gives Moscow something to bargain with when the subject is about the European security. The Russian politicians go even further and they are now calling for a NATO-CSTO partnership. The problem, however, is the imbalance of the two parties to the partnership. In the new European security architecture the CSTO role will be only peripheral. Under the circumstances, Moscow will not “suspect” the European security policy.

The idea of a Helsinki II treaty that would include the post-Cold War political modifications has its supporters in the West. Medvedev President considers that the new treaty would reflect the traditional Russian thinking. A new treaty, similar to the Helsinki one would become heavily politicized due to the differences in perception of the common values belonging to the signatory states. This would lead to the aggravation of the extant tensions from Europe, related to the subject. In this respect, the idea that the West could change Russia by commitments to democracy and human rights is delusional. The idea had been tried before with the Soviet Union through the Helsinki treaty, but it was unsuccessful and there were no evidence that things could have been different in Russia during President Putin office.

Can we speak of European security architecture? In order to have a meaningful discussion on the subject we need coherent mechanisms, a network of interconnected organizations and common values. Such conditions did not exist upon the signature of the Helsinki treaty, and for the time being they lack altogether. The regional organizations compete, the legitimacy of a European security mechanism is doubted, the gap between Russia and some of the Western countries is getting wider, and Moscow and the Western countries compete for influence.

### **9. Commitments that are mere declarations**

The President Medvedev’s lack of initiative was much criticized both in Russia and in the West: “this great vision remains only an idea, which is periodically referred to, without giving any detail about how to put into practice.”[5]

Moscow’s attitude only shows that Russia understands very well that a new security architecture would be dominated by USA and NATO. Thus, the flexible and open side of Russia’s foreign policy is emphasized. But a new agreement between Russia and Europe is still possible: strengthening the cooperation in the security and economy field in return for Europe’s commitment not to support NATO enlargement, the extension of the missile defense plan in the Central Europe and the geostrategic involvement in the former space of the Soviet Union.

But in the meantime this lack of initiative has its disadvantages. As long as Moscow cannot propose concrete measures, Medvedev’s initiative cannot be talked about. Although Medvedev and the Russian Foreign Minister Serghei Lavrov continue giving declarations in this respect, a loss of the political enthusiasm has been noticed lately. This state of

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things could point out to a conflict of interests among the Russian decision makers. The most plausible explanation is that subjects such as the improvement of the relations between USA and Russia and the world crisis have kept the attention of the Russian officials.

### **10. The American perspective**

The Obama administration has not only talked of revising the relations with Russia, but has reengaged in areas where it believes Russia can make a difference: strategic arms control, the Iranian nuclear question, and Afghanistan. At the same time, it has diminished the importance of issues such as NATO enlargement or missile defense. Washington's new policy has determined the reorientation of the Russian strategic thinking to the USA, although half of Russia's trade and investments go to the EU, and more and more politicians speak of a common European civilization. The fact that America is still the most powerful country in the world is a very important aspect for the Russian leaders.

All these aspects demonstrate that the negotiations about a new European security policy depend upon the future relations of Russia – USA. But if the bilateral relationship becomes sour or the tensions from the former Soviet space escalate, then the discussions about a new European/Euro-Atlantic security treaty could gain new impetus.

### **11. The challenge for Europe**

The main challenge for the European politicians is to find out what Russia really wants through President Medvedev's project. Some states from the Central and Eastern Europe consider Medvedev's project only a means to suppress NATO power and to enlarge Russia's sphere of influence. Some other countries such as Germany and France consider this initiative an opportunity to start a long term European security project, but these countries have not responded to President Medvedev's proposal as it was expected. The Europeans have foiled Moscow's plans to divide them and to remove the USA from the European context. They have refused to legitimize the notion of a Russian sphere of privileged interests; they have underlined NATO's primacy in European security policy, and in the meantime they have preserved a central role for the OSCE and they have left the onus on Moscow to deliver on the details of its security plan.

The idea launched by President Medvedev has led to unity of action at a European level as regards Russia. If we think of the latest major events (the war in Georgia and the global crisis, the new orientation of the American foreign policy towards multilateral cooperation and a Russia who is inclined towards confrontations) we can state that Europe's joint reaction to President Medvedev's proposal was foreseeable.

The final test is whether this European unity can withstand a more aggressive Russian foreign policy. In this respect, several traps should be identified. One is a misplaced belief that Moscow has seen the error of its confrontational ways. While the financial crisis has acted as a reality check on the Russian leaders, this will not lead to the conclusion that they have changed their attitude towards the West. Even if Moscow may have softened its foreign policy style, some things remain the same: Russia remains a great power; the conviction that the former Soviet republics belong to its sphere of influence; and a general view of the world as a fiercely competitive arena.

The trap, to which European states are prone, is represented by ideas such as strategic partnership and European security common space. Although EU and NATO member states share some priorities with Russia - in conventional arms control, counter-terrorism and combating transnational crime - there are many areas where their positions

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diverge (Russia's approach to the common neighborhood differs in almost every respect from that of the EU and NATO).

## **12. Conclusions**

In order to provide an alternative to the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, the European states must preserve the European unity and discipline, by observing the official positions of the EU and NATO. A coordinated transatlantic response would be an important test for Russia, the viability of Medvedev's initiatives depending on concrete actions.

The basis for a Euro-Atlantic security is represented by the rejection of any minimizing attempt of NATO. On the other hand, the Europeans and the Americans may include other institutions in the Euro-Atlantic security system. The cooperation Organization from Shanghai and the Collective Security Treaty Organization may bring a contribution in areas such as Afghanistan by terrorism and drug combat actions.

The new security treaty should reflect the values of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and not those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The human and social security – the development of the civil society, respect for the human rights – should be a part of any Pan – European security system. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe should preserve a major role.

The Russian President's project is in many ways a metaphor of Russia's commitment to the West. In the years to come, its form and substance will suffer many changes – some of them minor, others radical, some positive and others less. Despite all these changes, the West should have a pragmatic and flexible attitude.

Revising the European security architecture will not be an easy process. Establishing a strategic partnership with Russia does not hide the lack of a common vision. The dialogue is absolutely necessary in order to avoid misunderstandings and suspicions.

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