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Russia: just a normal great power?

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Summary

Russian foreign policy is driven by national interests; pragmatism has replaced ideology. Russia seems to act according to generally predictable and comprehensible rules and principles. Therefore the country should not be seen as an exception but rather as a normal power and – in due course – a normal great power.

Russia overplaying its energy card has been (mis)interpreted as neo-imperial ambitions rather than a rational policy meant to establish a more equitable system of international relations. It is mainly thanks to hydrocarbon energy wealth that former President Putin has been able to restore Russia's international status.

If the West considers Russia as an antagonist power, it will fail not only to build up cooperative relations but also will lose the chance to have Russia on its side in dealing with troubled areas. Instead both parts can benefit from a fair dialogue. Russia is not a country which the West may integrate through the traditional principle of conditionality but an equal partner willing to converge with Western established rules.

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Introduction

Russian foreign policy is driven by national interests; pragmatism has replaced ideology. Russia seems to act according to generally predictable and comprehensible rules and principles. Therefore the country should not be seen as an exception but rather as a normal power and – in due course – a normal great power.

The external dimension is not a structural factor in constructing internal consensus. Russia can count on a consistent internal legitimacy. People trust their rulers, appreciate the economic recovery of their country and are proud of the higher international profile regained by Russia. Nevertheless, the political elite is well aware that the country needs integrating into global market, especially if, like Russia, its economic base requires exports. To become a post-modern superpower it is first of all necessary to consolidate as an economic power. In recent years, Russia has developed a more mercantilist rather than imperialist posture towards international politics. However, the West keeps a conservative mindset in dealing with Moscow. In particular, the West tends to look at the way Russia interacts with other major international actors through the lenses of the Cold-War. This way of thinking strengthens old lines of division rather than providing new opportunities of cooperation.

Russia overplaying its energy card has been (mis)interpreted as neo-imperial ambitions rather than a predictable and rational policy meant to establish a more equitable system of international relations. It is mainly thanks to hydrocarbon energy wealth that former President Putin has been able to strengthen the Russian state, to overcome economic crisis, to pay off the foreign debt obligations and finally to restore Russia's international status.

An erroneous diagnosis leads to a wrong prognosis and ultimately to a failing strategy. So if the West considers Russia as an antagonistic power, it will fail not only to build up cooperative relations but also will lose the chance to have Russia on its side in dealing with troubled areas such as the Middle East or Central Asia or with troublesome countries such as Iran, Afghanistan and Syria. Furthermore, Russia is well poised for facing crucial questions such as terrorism, pollution, high prices of commodities, energy supplies. The West-Russia relationship is definitely not a zero sum game as in the past.

Instead both parts can benefit from a fair dialogue. In terms of power resources, Russia might even be better equipped for playing on many different geo-political scenarios and for tackling post-modern global menaces. In addition, Russian leverage is mostly based on a soft but influential resource (Russia is also a military power but this is used as a last resort) at a time when resorting to military power can be both costly and inefficacious. This offers an additional reason for the West to improve relations with Russia.

Russian foreign policy is proactive and strategic with clear or rather predictable objectives. The West, on the contrary, has experienced a number of international failures (Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Balkans, Georgia) and in many situations is puzzled and divided. Western goals and accordingly strategies are fluid due to the imminent US presidential election and to usual European weakness. The confusion surrounding the

adoption of the Lisbon reform Treaty will not help Russia to understand and deal with the EU. It can be argued that the West potentially knows its counterpart better while Russia might find distinguishing between Western actors and their international objectives difficult. For Russia it is harder to deal/negotiate with the West than viceversa.

We recommend a more creative and coherent approach on the Western side. Russia is not a country which the West may integrate through the traditional principle of conditionality but an equal partner willing to comply with Western established rules. Nevertheless, Russia does not hesitate to use force in the advancement of national interests when these are put under strain (see Georgia). Otherwise, Russia is ready to adopt the required measures for entering the WTO and OECD and enjoy the free trade advantages. As a result, Russia is becoming closer to the West and this process of convergence might have positive effects on the country's democratic performance. Growing similarities among suspicious countries should lead to an increasing familiarity and thus to more cooperative attitudes.

Russia is a more global actor (both in terms of goals and tools) than is generally thought. The West is facing the choice between cooperating with Russia in different scenarios – making good use of its geopolitical omnipresence, role and, leverage – or leaving to Russia the privilege of establishing alternative alliances. Current Russia appears one of the greatest chances for successful global action by the West.

“Russia has a unique capacity for attracting the world’s attention”

Alexis de Tocqueville

1. Russian Foreign policy: from catastrophe to normality

Russian foreign policy cannot be approached without taking into account domestic developments. Since *perestroika* was launched in 1985, Russia has engaged in a grandiose modernization process. Although being influenced by international theories of democratic transition, the country has followed an original pathway that induces many analysts to doubt Russia as a democratic regime. Russia’s poor democratic record is not contemplated as a phase of democratic consolidation but rather as a political decision favouring the establishment of a partial democracy. The deteriorating status of democracy (due to the verticalization of power, i.e. the direct appointment of local governors by the Russian President, and no longer by local authorities) would confirm this line of reasoning. However, it could be argued that each state has its own way to carry out transformation which must take into consideration structural features, historical and political background along with society’s structure. In particular, Russia remains a laggard among post-Soviet empire nations in building a middle class.

With the end of the Cold-War, Russia was also forced to redefine its role in the international context and to re-forge its network of relations finding new balances of power. As former president Vladimir Putin underlined “... the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”¹. It destroyed the previous equilibrium (of terror) and caused a radical restructuring of the International System (IS) including nature and scope of multilateral fora (e.g. NATO, OSCE). Russia is behaving aggressively because it wants to catch-up for the “lost” 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It seeks to achieve a balancing role in major international disputes and their settlement in order to avoid any further exclusion from world affairs. It does not have stable political allies but prefers instead establishing strategic partnerships. Russian foreign policy had also, among others, the tough task of setting up new relations with former Soviet Republics. This process is still shaping Russian foreign policy with significant implications on Russia-West relations.

At the same time, Russia was facing impressive domestic upheavals. Indeed, in the 1990s Russian economy experienced a long and deep crisis with oligarchs taking advantage of this weakness and managing both economy and domestic politics to their own interests. When Putin came to power his foremost priority was to recover and restructure the foundations of economy, find a key strength for the economy capable to re-build it such as natural riches², reshape domestic politics and rethink the foreign strategy. The process of returning to the status of a leading force is still underway since the country is far from having completed the economic transition, ensuring a long-term economic growth based on diversification, innovation, and new technologies, strengthening the society and the overall living standards.

¹ V. PUTIN, *State-of-the-nation address*, April 25, 2005.

² Energy is deemed to be a kind of “soft power” in recent and current Russian foreign politics.

It is worth remembering that the rebirth of Russia as an international actor dates back to its economic recovery. In fact, the two presidencies of Putin sought “to legitimize Russia’s new role and to project its power through economic, as opposed to traditional political-military means”³. This sequence – strengthening politically and economically the Russian state → restoring Russia international status → acting assertively – still moulds the Russian conception of foreign policy. Moscow increasingly uses economic leverage for political benefit (as in the case of Ukraine, Belarus). Russia aims at establishing itself as a leading economic power and at integrating into global markets.

Russia’s resurgence as an assertive and confident actor in IS after a period of introspection devoted to the sorting out of domestic troubles is one of the most intriguing topics in the analysis of current international politics. Such an analysis has often been influenced by prejudice, stereotyping and conservative bloc-based thinking. In particular, the West tends to look at the way Russia interacts with the major international actors through the lenses of the Cold-War. This way of thinking continues to maintain lines of division rather than offering fresh opportunities of cooperation. Moscow instead seems more emancipated from the legacy of the past and inspired by pragmatism based on *realpolitik*. Russia also wants to define its relations with the West in a completely new atmosphere avoiding remembrance of the Soviet period that ended with its “defeat”. It can be argued that the West is still victim of “ideology” and history while Russia is mostly driven by a realistic or even a cynical approach towards politics.

The new realism of Putin sought to craft a foreign policy that asserted Russia’s national interests while re-enforcing and re-integrating its role in the world political and economic arena. He tried to break free from the traditionally static, monolithic and zero-sum representations of Russia’s role in the world. The new realism does not mean giving up aspirations to global influence. Russia is simply showing flexibility and adaptation to the evolving of the IS. Among the great powers Russia has the utmost advantage of resting on energy resources and pipelines. In this perspective, Russia is revealing itself as a truly ‘soft power’ able to exert influence and to accumulate political leverage beyond hard military power. This is not to say that hard power is not important as the conflict in Georgia has clearly showed⁴. Furthermore, Russia is located at the centre of a net of new emerging powers (China, India), which might be alternative partners to the West.

According to Kozyrev⁵ a “normal great power” means to achieve Russian interests not through confrontation but through cooperation. For this reason, Russia is inclined to normalize its relations with the world, it wants to be engaged with the existing institutions (post-communist Russia is a joiner) and to promote new frameworks

³ A.E. STENT, *Restoration and revolution in Putin’s foreign policy*, in «Europe-Asia Studies», Vol. 60, N. 6, August 2008, p. 1089.

⁴ Russia’s budget spending on state defense orders will amount to \$46.8 bln in 2009. The spending figure as outlined in the budget for 2009-2011 envisaged additional spending of \$6.63 bln in comparison to previous annual programs. Military analysts point out that Russia, which sold \$7 bln worth of arms in 2007 making it the second-largest exporter of conventional weapons after the US, decided to increase military spending following the five-day conflict with Georgia. This increase coincides with the announcement by President Medvedev that the modernization of armed forces is a priority for Russia. It is worth remembering that Russia’s defence spending is a fraction of the US one.

⁵ A. KOZYREV, *Russia: A Chance for Survival*, in «Foreign Affairs», Spring 1992.

responding to its national interests. As far as well-established Western organizations (EU, NATO, OCSE) are concerned, Russia aspires to be treated as an equal partner without incurring the costs of membership, which is seen to impose restraints on its domestic room for manoeuvre.

Cooling relations with the EU depends on the very nature of the process of European integration more than on increasing competing interests. Russia considers the EU as a temporary phenomenon, a political, artificial construction unable to represent and accomplish all the national interests of its 27 member states. According to Krastev, "At the heart of the current crisis is not the clash between democracy and authoritarianism (history demonstrates that democratic and authoritarian states can easily cooperate), but the clash between the post-modern state embodied by the EU and the traditional modern state embodied by Russia"⁶. In this perspective, Russia's alleged "*divide et impera*" European strategy would simply reflect the idea that in Europe sovereign nation-states still count. It is then easier and more profitable to do business with individual EU member states than with the EU as such. The EU unity is in fact weak, reflecting diverse levels of energy dependency and historical memories and experiences with Russia⁷.

In addition, the EU and Russia interpret history and memory differently. The Russian elite tends to emphasize a prestigious national history rather than reconsider accepted interpretations of the past. In contrast, Europeans give primacy to the *devoir de mémoire* on which the whole process of European integration is based (reconciliation). Gomart affirms that Russia and some of the EU member states "...are engaged in a 'battle of memories' rooted in the interpretation of communism and Nazism on the one hand and of the Cold-War on the other, not to mention World War II"⁸.

The EU-Russia relationship also suffers from an excess of institutionalism. As Gomart highlights there is "...a discrepancy between the multitude of bilateral structures and the scarcity of feasible joint process. Paradoxically, the institutionalization of the relationship has not institutionalized confidence between the partners"⁹. Once again, the EU capacity to build up sophisticated frameworks for dealing with the outside areas/countries might be a way for dissimulating contrasts or not confronting real issues.

Russia has a general preference for intergovernmental organizations which are not intended to replace the nation-state. These frameworks serve (either by supporting the creation of new organizations or their reinforcement) Moscow's desire to exert influence over the participating countries and thus assume a leading role. When these organizations are region-focused, Russia's intent is to play a guiding role and becoming a sort of gravitational regional power.

⁶ I. KRASTEVA, *Russia as the other Europe*, in «Global Affairs», n. 4, October-December 2007, p. 7.

⁷ The EU is perceived as highly fragmented, *Izvestia* (September 1, 2008), for instance, published a map of EU states divided into four categories: "virulent critics": Baltic states, Britain, Poland, Sweden; "moderate critics": Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania; "centrists": Austria, Finland, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Slovakia; "Moscow lobbyists": Belgium, Cyprus, France, Luxembourg, Germany, Greece, Italy.

⁸ T. GOMART, *EU-Russia Relations, Toward a Way Out of Depression*, Ifri-CSIS, July 2008, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

Russia is a great power acting as a part of the status quo rather than as a revisionist force setting up as a competitor for global hegemony. Putin insists that Russia must join the community of western nations but should do so in its own way. Russia will remain a great power but a normal one. It will not claim to be the centre of an alternative ideological or geopolitical bloc. Russia has drawn a line and readjusted the global geopolitical balance but only at the margins. Russia does not represent an ideological challenge anymore. However, it does claim autonomy and it wants to be part of the West but on its own terms. It refuses to be blamed for what others do as well (How can the US accuse Russia of having infringed Georgia's sovereignty when it invaded Iraq, a sovereign country?).

In various and uneven ways the West tried to devise strategies to make integration possible, but always accompanied by conditionality features designed for countries in the process of accession to western institutions, which ultimately proved counterproductive in Russia's case. The most striking example is the EU-Russia relationship. Brussels seeks to impose certain conditions on Russian political, economic and social development, as it does in the case of EU candidate members. This tactic however proves to be inadequate for Russia since it cannot be equalled to such states. Russia has and deserves a different role in world politics. Exerting excessive pressure on its domestic politics results in encouraging anti-Western nationalist forces. The conditionality approach towards Russia means explicitly diminishing its role and force on the international arena and rejecting its contribution and worthiness in shaping the international political landscape. The West should stop being paternalistic towards Moscow and acknowledge its revival. On the contrary, Russia is ready to comply with the rules of those organizations, such as WTO and OECD, where it can enjoy an equal status and the rewards are particularly palatable.

Western analysts persist in viewing Russia and its external choices as highly subjective. Russia is often treated as a special case. We believe that the most suitable way to consider Russia's foreign policy is rather to recognize it as a "normal" country in the sense that it acts according to generally predictable and comprehensible rules and principles. Further seeing Russia as an exception would be misleading. The West has tended to interpret Russian actions as excessive or arrogant, while they have often been a normal, measured response to the penetration of the US and the EU in regions traditionally considered Russia's sphere or to hostile decisions (see the US missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic, Kosovo recognition). The enlargement of NATO has been perceived as a "geopolitical injustice" concocted by Washington.

The West needs to overcome its deeply held suspicions of Moscow and the bitter memories of the past. This does not mean being lenient towards Russia but rather realistic. An erroneous diagnosis leads to a wrong prognosis and finally to a failing strategy. So, if the West continues to see Russia as an antagonistic power it will fail to build up cooperative relations. Not only, the West would gain from having Russia on its side when dealing with troubled areas such as the Middle East or Central Asia or when facing crucial questions such as terrorism, pollution, rising prices, energy supply.

The way Russian behaviour in foreign policy is understood by the other actors is relevant in designing the right strategy to deal with it. If the West still believes that

Russia's main goal is to become an imperialistic power again, then the right policy would be that of containment. However, the West should keep in mind that Russia's abandonment of its empire was mainly peaceful¹⁰ and that the desire to maintain a certain influence on its former republics does not necessarily mean a desire to rebuild an empire. Because Russia overplayed its energy card, this was largely misinterpreted as the neo-imperial ambitions of the Kremlin, and not as a natural and logical policy meant to set up an equitable system of international relations. Russia is not a neo-imperial power but a post-imperial country in search of a new international identity.

The risk is also high to apply the same western developed categories in forecasting future Russian moves especially in relation to an alleged more cooperative approach. Those who apply theories of democratic transition to Russian foreign policy expect that democratic consolidation, market economy, civil society activation would lead to a more accommodating posture. Likewise, those who refer to the two-level game theory would have expected the double large legitimacy Putin and his protégée Medvedev received, respectively at the Duma and presidential elections, to have resulted in a more cooperative foreign policy¹¹.

We argue instead that Russian foreign policy is not conceived as a systemic factor for internal consensus. As mentioned above, Russia could only play again as a great power after re-emerging from the deep crisis of the 90's. The country's external dimension did not help cure the internal catastrophe. Assertiveness in foreign policy helps cement national identity and patriotism but is not a reliable means for nourishing internal legitimacy¹². Contemporary Russian foreign policy has been determined by both history (self-image as a great power) and a sense of frustration the country suffered after the implosion of the Soviet system that was also accompanied by a deep economic slump. Once Russia returned among the great powers (able to influence the IS balance and the unipolar power of the US)¹³ its priority has been the consolidation of its international role and the expansion of its influence over strategic areas primarily through internal modernization.

2. *Russia and the International System*

After the 1989-1991 period there have been two fundamental failures of the West's policy towards Russia that led to the current strained relationship. The first one is mainly a political one. The end of Cold-War ideological confrontation did not bring

¹⁰ See D. TRENIN, B. LO, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, p. 6.

¹¹ The two-level theory sustains that domestic politics and international relations are intricately entangled. R.D. PUTNAM, *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games*, International Organization, Vol. 42, N. 3, Summer 1988, pp. 427-460.

¹² Although the image of Putin and Medvedev has consistently improved following the Georgian conflict (see Surveys conducted by the Russian public opinion research institute Levada-Center, <http://www.levada.ru/press/2008082102.html>), this was not provoked by Russians for a reason of domestic consensus.

¹³ Nevertheless, Russia on the occasion of the "war on terror" was ready to side with the US. Putin avoided confrontation exploiting the US weakness and rather improved the bilateral relations on a broad range of issues (e.g. cooperation in intelligence, proliferation security, energy dialogue).

about the relative dissolution of the political and military institutions characterizing that period, including NATO. Instead, the Alliance continued to be the reference point for the West's collective security regime. It was even strengthened and its membership extended to Eastern countries. As the communist order collapsed, the capitalist system survived and became the only political and ideological alternative possible. Russia went through a deep economic and social crisis, which temporarily weakened its capacity to participate in world leadership. The West thus got a unique opportunity to involve Russia in the building up of a new world order based on mutual political and military interests and a collaborative spirit. However, this historical initiative and occasion was definitely lost. The inability to overcome either national or common European memories, combined with the lack of a well-defined strategy for an alternative world order, pushed the West to choose the only path for continuation on the pattern of conduct designed along dividing lines. Moreover, this failure provoked throughout the last years a growing sense of insecurity, suspicion and today, politics of mutual miscalculation and lack of understanding. Moreover, the domestic collapse of Russia during the 1990s reinforced the Western, and in particular, the US, hypothesis that the country would not recover and would never again be a real challenge to their world politics.

Therefore, a unilateral approach in global affairs took place with Washington assuming the leadership position. However, this model of a unipolar world did not undergo any significant transformation through the years. It could not evolve into a self-regulating and self-preserving system, thus paving the way to future cracks such as the incapacity to take into account the rise of new global power centres, which included Russia. The system of international relations was shaped by the convergence towards the US of the foreign policies of the majority of states and a lack of inter-state regional links, creating a kind of balancing of forces under the hegemonic top of Washington. This would later turn out to be America's weakest spot. To some extent, it represented a rigid model of international relations governance, which was not able to adapt to the changing reality. Indeed, gradually and driven by a strong economic development, boosted by the exploration of large oil and gas resources, Russia succeeded in re-gaining its previous strength and in re-affirming its civilization identity. This scenario led to the second type of Western failure – the strategic one. There were several strategic shortcomings that ultimately caused confrontation and determined the current state of affairs. They include:

- (1) the onset of a new nuclear age;
- (2) the asymmetric advance of NATO, accompanied by Russia's forced retreat from regions of strategic value for its survival as a world power, and the overall increasing militarization of international politics;
- (3) the incorporation of former Soviet bloc members into the enlarging Western institutions while failing to transcend their historic animus against Russia (in the EU case, there is a danger that Brussels is being manipulated by its new members pursuing their own historical and political agendas, reviving thus the Cold-War mentality);
- (4) the potential breakdown of the CFE treaty (see paragraph 3);

(5) the energy and pipelines politics¹⁴.

These failures coincided with the recent strong resurgence of Russia. In fact, Putin has often emphasized the benefits for Russia's transformation achieved through its increasing involvement in the IS as a model of modernization. In this way international politics become an important component of national development. The IS is an opportunity for strengthening the domestic reforming process and for ensuring a steady economic growth. The prospect of membership in both the WTO and the OECD has already produced an important legislative harmonization in key areas for the transformation of Russia into a market economy (the Russian economy has never been as integrated into the world economy as it is today). Notwithstanding tensions with the EU, there have even been cases of "unintended Europeanization" where the rule was adopted not in order to comply with EU provisions but in order to modernize national legislation. This means that Russia is converging towards a model of Western governance¹⁵.

It is worth noting that Russia's participation in several international venues expresses Moscow's preference for multilateralism. Multilateralism is pursued to the extent it helps realize Russian interests. Organizations with a low level of institutionalization or focusing on specific sectors are preferred in contrast to those highly politicized such as the EU. Often, in cases where bilateral relations result more fruitful these are established beyond organization membership and institutional constraints. Russia follows a network diplomacy approach. This approach moves from a particular vision of the IS: "The world is becoming a polyarchy – an international system run by numerous and diverse actors with a shifting kaleidoscope of associations and dependencies"¹⁶.

A key obstacle to the formation of real multipolarity lies in the inertial foreign policy posture of the majority of Russia's potential allies: Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, the EU, China and India, which all persist in adjusting their foreign policy vectors to the position of the US. A multipolarity, in the form of weakening of American hegemony and the absence of any commonly agreed mechanisms for maintaining global stability, constitute a threat to Russia's national interests¹⁷ and a poor environment for the promulgation of its policies. Multipolarity should be based on legitimate international legal mechanisms, which could remove the deep socio-economic, inter-ethnic and other contradictions that underlie conflicts and not on ideological arguments and claims.

In particular, Russia increasingly looks at the IS in an economic perspective. Still a Marxist type of analysis? No, this approach stems from past Soviet experience and a realistic perception of world trends. First of all, Russia is well aware that it cannot be a great power except on the basis of a strong economy (including diversification and

¹⁴ R. SAKWA, "New Cold War" or twenty years' crisis? *Russia and international politics*, in «International Affairs», Vol. 84, N. 2, March 2008.

¹⁵ On this subject see G. MELONI, *Convergence, best practice and Europeanization: a valuable way to rethink EU-Russia relations?* ISPI Working Paper 29.

¹⁶ S. LAVROV, *Munich: World Politics at the Crossroads*, in «Moskovskiye Novosti», March 23, 2007.

¹⁷ The new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, issued in July 2008 and slightly modified after the Georgia crisis in August 2008, explicitly states Russia's determination to promote and strengthen a multipolar world order. The text is available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>.

modernization) and of a technological revolution. In fact, last November former President Putin announced a program on scientific research (nano- and biotechnology, nuclear energy, aerospace) for the period 2008-2012 and highlighted that for the first time the total expenditure in this sector would amount to \$24.6 bln by 2010. Putin affirmed that Russian science should develop through the establishment of innovative technical areas and technology parks. Moreover, current President Medvedev's electoral program focused on the four "I"s: Institutions, Infrastructure, Innovation, and Investment. Yet in 2007 a nanotechnology corporation was established, whose functions include interaction between government, business and scientists on the implementation of state policy in nanotechnology and nano-industry, and organizational and financial assistance to programs and selection of nanotech projects. Indeed, Russia seems willing to become a world model of hyper-modernization, and so a great power.

Secondly, Russia has developed a global approach towards economics. As E.B. Rumer stresses "Russia is re-emerging on the world economic stage guided by a mercantilist vision founded on its material wealth, a geographic position that gives it control of important trade routes, and the fact that most of its neighbours need the resources Russia either owns or controls"¹⁸. Russia is willing to join important economic and financial frameworks such as the G7. For Russia economic growth not only buys off the rising middle class (and poor working/rural class) and assures the status of a great power but also allows it to impact on world affairs through participation in economic international fora.

Russia aspires to shape a grand strategy moving beyond pragmatism and to become a multi-dimensional global power acting in different geostrategic theatres¹⁹. While the US holds a global vision of world affairs, the EU seems more focused on certain areas or concerned with specific issues, and is divided over salient issues of foreign policy including common positions towards Russia. This depends on the fact that the EU is not a Super-state but a post-modern entity dominated by nation states and that it has a typically regional vocation.

Furthermore, while Russia has a broad portfolio of potential partners (a key element of an enhanced Russo-Chinese relationship is precisely that it gives each of them stronger alternatives to cooperation with the West on the latter terms), the US and the EU are more static in their foreign relations. The fact that Russia is not involved in campaigns like worldwide democracy promotion but leaves the form of governance to the choice of the single country, makes it less constrained in selecting its allies. The concept of "sovereign democracy" proclaimed by Russia to hold down Western influence in the Soviet space helps Moscow conclude affairs also with non-democratic countries (see Iran, Syria and Venezuela). Russia's friends are not required to comply with any particular political regime's conditions in order to benefit from Russia's cooperation.

¹⁸ E.B. RUMER, *Russian Foreign Policy Beyond Putin*, in «Adelphi Papers», May 2007, p. 57.

¹⁹ For example, recently Russia has also expanded its economic reach to Africa. Gazprom and Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) signed an exploration and production sharing agreement on an oil and gas field. Gazprom is expected to invest over \$100 mln in the project, won in a tender in December 2007. The Russian giant is currently running three projects in Libya.

The table below synthesizes the main features of Russia as a contemporary *great* power, highlighting both its strengths and weaknesses. On balance, the first surpass the second. Moreover, Russia knows how to make the most of its power resources. The main challenge to a solid/assertive Russian foreign policy derives from the country's uncertain domestic situation (consequences of more economic liberalization and political pluralism), from social emergencies (demographic contraction, increasing disparity, centre-periphery gap, growing poverty, possible alienation of the middle class from the current political rule), from possible setbacks in the modernization of the country (transports, other infrastructures, good governance, economic diversification), and from the business world (gloomy global economic trends and the weakening oil price and rising dollar, fall in stock market, more cautious foreign direct investment). Unless Russia tackles these crucial questions, the country might encounter difficulties in keeping its place among international powers.

Table 1

Russia as a great power?

Power Sources	Weak Points	Means
Consistent internal legitimacy	Lack of trust abroad	Political use of Strategic resources
Power continuity and stability	Very poor ability to attract, especially after Russian troops marched into Georgia ²⁰	Economic influence not only exerted by State giants such as Gazprom but also by an increasing number of Russian successful multinationals
Strong national identity/resurgent nationalism among youth	Strategic resources will come to an end; consumer countries are searching for alternative energy sources	Through membership in the key economic organizations Russia will try to shape world trade rules

²⁰ The invasion of Georgia by Russia has damaged the international image of the latter with the television pictures conjuring up memories of Prague in 1968 and, more recently of Chechnya. Such a negative press coverage in the Western media might have negative effects on FDI. But the Western media coverage appears quite biased. In other parts of the world the Georgian crisis has been differently assessed with less acrimony and relevance than in the West.

Size	Oil prices might collapse while dollar rise	Network diplomacy: no alliance is forever. Russia is open to different strategic partnership options. Flexible strategic partnerships + regional groups + multilateral forums
History (self-image as a great power)	Demographic decline ²¹	Tactical use of soft power as a legitimizing tool
No longer ideological values but material foundation: paying off all its foreign debt, currency reserves increase, sustained economic growth	Increasing social inequality and growing poverty	Offering an alternative to a world led by the West without asking for a regime change (no conditionality or interference in domestic affairs, respect of the principle of 'sovereign democracy')
Strategic resources -oil and gas (Russia is the only BRIC market which has independent net resources of oil and gas)	Centre-periphery gap, different levels of development, poor infrastructure	Using the veto option in the Security Council within the UN
Use of food exports (Russia, the world's fifth biggest exporter of cereals, plans to form a state grain trading company to control up to half of the country's cereal exports) ²²	Weak state: inefficient institutions and widespread corruption	Promotion of Russian culture and language; re-branding the international image of Russia, overshadowing the Soviet past

²¹ Russian population, racked by ill-health and inequality, is shrinking by up to 800,000 a year.

²² The state control over strategic sectors (including re-nationalization) is not driven by a return to a communist logic but rather by power politics reasoning. In contrast with the Western Europe tendency to limit the weight of the state as both the result of the process of European integration and a longer exposition to the effects of globalization, Russia is engaged in reinforcing its role.

Russia has the potential to be one of the world's most powerful economies in the next 7-20 years ²³	Possible divergences in the diarchy Medvedev/Putin	Hyper-modernization for becoming an economic giant and a great power
In comparison to other great powers, Russia has a broader portfolio of alternative friends/allies/partners	Personalization of power	
Russia is entering the most important economic international organizations (WTO, OECD) where it will play a significant role	Opposition forces might gain consensus. In about 5-7 years time the rising Russian middle class could become more assertive and claim a larger voice in politics	
By entering those organizations, the West has relinquished its possibility of conditioning Russia (conditionality is applied by the main IO)	Unresolved conflicts: Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabakh	

3. Russia-US military confrontation and international defence normative framework

The economic and political revival of Russia also includes a military renaissance. The latter implies modernization of military. However, reviving Russian military might does not necessarily imply a commitment to engage in an arms race. Becoming a primary actor in the decision-making process on security issues implies increasing the investment and strengthening the use of modern technologies to allow the country to rapidly replace the obsolete Soviet defence capabilities²⁴.

Moscow is well aware that gaining its previous status of a key and independent world leader capable of defining the global state of affairs cannot be achieved without

²³ D. THORNILEY, *Russia Really is the Best Market in the World*, Corporate Network, EIU, Position Paper N.79, April 2008.

²⁴ The August conflict in Georgia provided Russia with an occasion to test its weaponry. Although it won the war, the latter revealed its military weaknesses such as a unsatisfactory system of command, control, communication, surveillance and reconnaissance; limited scope of night-time operations, and weak air defence forces. *Russia's rapid reaction*, IISS Strategic Comments, Vol. 14, Issue 7, September 2008.

boosting the defence industry and reforming the armed forces²⁵. This aspiration is clearly linked to challenging the US hegemonic military-political unilateralist conduct in the international arena, as former President Putin put it at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (February 2007). Russia's goal is not to compete with the US and its NATO allies, with the risk of dissipating its current strength and resources but rather to build up capable, effective and combat-ready forces allowing the country to compel the West to take into account its voice and its restoration as a great normal power. Russian military capabilities are meant to either erode American hegemony and, in particular, NATO, which is seen as a military threat and an anti-Russian grouping, and to support Russia's aspirations to renovate its influence in Eurasia replacing the US presence (the Georgia crisis is the most striking example). Therefore, the immediate goals of Russia's force development are:

- application of military-political pressure on the domestic and foreign policies of countries in the post-Soviet space, even by the use of force if this is deemed necessary (among the five guiding principles of the new foreign policy doctrine President Medvedev announced that "Russia pays special attention to particular regions, regions in which it has privileged interests" explicitly hinting at the former Soviet republics);
- containment of the US and NATO to prevent their interference in possible conflict in the post-Soviet space;
- suppression of internal acts of separatism and terrorism²⁶.

Moreover, President Medvedev advanced the proposal "to create an open, democratic system of regional collective security and cooperation ensuring the unity of the Euro-Atlantic region, in such a way as not to allow its new fragmentation and reproduction of bloc-based approaches which still persist in the European architecture that took shape during the Cold-War period. The essence of the initiative is aimed at concluding a European security treaty"²⁷.

The trend of advancing the military capabilities is reflected in numerous initiatives undertaken in the last months such as the testing of new strategic weapons and systems, the resumption of long-distance patrol flights of strategic bombers with simulated bomber raids and missiles launches, the successful test-fired short-range anti-ballistic missile, the announced 10-year weapon modernization program, the centralizing of defence industry under Kremlin's direct control and the planned military reform ending up in the possibility to adopt a new military doctrine in response to NATO expansion Eastward.

The most outstanding example of military confrontation is the US project to station components of a US missile defence system on the territory of Poland and the Czech Republic aiming to counter international terrorism and countries sponsoring it, especially those striving to acquire nuclear weapons as Iran. Russia blames the US for destroying the balance of strategic forces in Europe and for posing a direct threat to its

²⁵ Indeed, according to Putin there are four sectors that are aimed at boosting Russia's rise: 1) oil and gas production; 2) development of transport infrastructures; 3) strengthening the military industry; 4) reinforcing the atomic industry.

²⁶ M. BARABANOV, *Towards a military doctrine for Russia*, in «Moscow Defence Brief», N. 1/2008, p. 5.

²⁷ July 2008 Concept on Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.

national security, while explicitly challenging its current strategic capabilities. Moscow's current abrasive tone is thus a reaction to the US provocative project. Furthermore, recent decisive advancement of the project (see the signing of bilateral US-Poland and US-Czech Republic agreements paving the way towards the implementation of the defence program and approval in early September of \$89 mln by the US Congress for the deployment of an anti-missile radar, without however indicating the hosting country) exacerbates Russia's sensibility and further damages relations.

Furthermore, Moscow's new foreign policy, stemming from a multipolar world order, emphasizes the need to take into consideration other international actors' national interests, which, according to the Kremlin, is not the case with the US missile defence project. The US, instead, continues to reassure that the anti-missile plan is not aimed at Russia. However, Washington made some fundamental errors that had complicated the debate:

- it viewed the missile defence primarily as a technological issue while paying too little attention to the broader political-strategic implications for arms control and European security;
- the administration failed to develop a coherent rationale for its deployment;
- the US administration underestimated the influence of public opinion in Eastern Europe;
- the US initially portrayed the deployment in Central Europe as an extension of its plans to build a national missile defence system to protect the US. Only later on, when the EU members began to raise the troubling questions about the rationale, did it emphasize its European dimension;
- Washington's initial missile defence plans left Turkey and large parts of southern Europe unprotected. In effect, the deployment plans risked dividing Europe into two unequal zones of security²⁸.

Although the anti-missile shield appears an initiative that is highly dependent on the foreign and military policies of the next US President as well as on the new (if ever) US national strategy in response to the Georgian August 2008 crisis, it is likely that US installations' capabilities will be improved further in the future, through, for example, the increase of the number of interceptor missiles. Such scenario is indeed viewed as the real threat to Russian national security, especially if the missile defence components in Central Europe are connected with other elements of the American defence system, as those in the Western US, posing a possible threat to Russia's Far East. Leaving apart Russia's criticisms, the proposed US defence configuration may not be able to cover all the territory of Europe, requiring thus the development of additional defence sub-systems: ground-based short-range interceptors (located in Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, or Albania) and Aegis sea-based interceptors, in addition to a radar placed closer to Iran. Related to this issue is the question of a greater involvement of all European NATO members so to preserve the Alliance unity. Bush's administration showed a preference towards a bilateral approach with its partners but experts signal this may compromise the future stability of defence plans.

²⁸ F.S. LARRABEE, *Whither Missile Defence?*, in «The International Spectator», Vol. 43, N. 2, June 2008.

Even though current strategic confrontation between the US and Russia has apparently different goals, the debate is also rooted in the geostrategic configuration and regulation of the Russian-US legal framework regarding arms control. The arsenal capacities and national defence programs' objectives of both countries have changed over the past 30 years so as to comply with the developments of international relations. The 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) between the former USSR and USA limiting strategic defensive systems in each party's territory and restricting any base for such defence systems in other regions was scrapped by President George W. Bush in 2002. This move may be interpreted as the first attempt to build-up a global defence system and test new strategic weapons.

Meanwhile, the US and Russia signed the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-I), which is due to expire in 2009. Its importance stems from the reduction and not mere limiting (as was the case of the ABM Treaty) of strategic offensive arms and from its highly effective inspection-based mechanisms, aimed at creating high levels of confidence and transparency in strategic defence activities.

Shortly after the signing of the Treaty the Soviet Union began to collapse and lacked any idea of future development of strategic defence. The following transformations in international affairs provided conditions to negotiate the far deeper cuts of the 1993 START-II Treaty, which was tightly linked to AMB Treaty preservation. START-II indeed never entered into force, leaving START-I provisions unchanged.

In 2002 a new Russia-US Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions (SORT) came into force reducing and limiting, by the end of 2012, each party's aggregate number of strategic nuclear warheads to 1.700-2.200. The pact was largely criticized for its total lack of provisions guaranteeing its observation, instead of referring to START-I terms, and for the possibility of re-deploying stored warheads.

START-I and SORT Treaties are due to expire shortly and their fate is currently being discussed. It is likely that some terms will be modified because deemed obsolete, but the question is which ones and how. Some analysts argue that President George W. Bush's administration is not eager to extend START-I Treaty. It is this flexibility that could pose serious threats to Russian national security since the system gives the US the potential of delivering the first strike and preventing possible counter-strikes. Unlike the US non legally binding formula, Russia is pushing for a legally binding option on START-I that envisages its replacement or extension. The country is trying to address a concept of strategic stability in a broader context, including offensive and defensive strategic arms, space weapons, anti-submarine warfare – all perceived as potential threats to its future deterrence capability.

As regards tactical weapons, the 1987 Short-and-Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is currently in force. The Treaty obliged both Russia and the US to eliminate all of their intermediate-range and shorter-range ground-launched cruise and ballistic missiles by 1991, banned the possession, production and flight-testing of such missiles, and foresaw an extensive inspection regime, which ended in 2001. Its future is however, highly uncertain too. At a time when the US is not a party to the ABM pact (hence, capable to extend its national defence system outside its territory) and is likely to scrap the START-I verification regime, the last resort in Russian-US strategic defence relations pertains to the INF provisions, which are of unlimited duration. Russia

has already stated that the pact no longer serves its national security because it limits and consequently weakens its defence capabilities compared to growing defence capabilities of other nuclear countries.

Finally, the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)²⁹, seen as the guarantee against remilitarization in Europe, has been considered by Russia worthless and unable to ensure an equilibrium of military forces in view of NATO enlargement eastwards. As of December 12, 2007 Russia suspended its obligations under the CFE Treaty due to “exceptional circumstances that affect its national security”.

The unilateral suspension means Moscow is no longer obliged to mutual monitoring and exchange of information, nor it has to accept inspecting teams on Russian territory or pre-announce its troops' movements. Consequently the other signatories have no means to obtain this data. Russia's suspension is due to two overlapping reasons: on the one hand, displeasure with the slow pace of ratification of the 1999 Adaptation Agreement by the other parties' (NATO members, including former Soviet Union states) and, on the other hand, a reaction to US advancements in installing an anti-missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic. The June 2008 President Medvedev's calls for a legally-binding European security treaty confirm the overall trend in Russia's foreign policy to revise the previous major agreements with the West and to actively participate in designing the new strategic architecture (the suspension from CFE Treaty does not mean a withdrawal from the pact but signals Russia's willingness to establish a constructive dialogue with the West).

Treaties' limitations are gradually losing their force as the parties withdraw or delay ratifications. Moscow's decisions to suspend CFE Treaty and the possible withdraw from the INF are symptomatic of Russian foreign policy position at present. On the one hand, it needs to overcome the “isolation” from the majority of former Soviet republics and current NATO members³⁰, but as well as from such a global security design as the US proposal, as long as the country is not able to act alone. On the other hand, Russia is likely to pull out of those treaties that do not any longer serve its national security so it can amend and formulate an adequate defence policy.

Russia is waiting for the new US presidency agenda to decide on the Treaties' fate. Meanwhile, the only viable approach is to call for a restoration of international multiple balance of power, where Russia has its influence, to show a cooperative spirit towards other international major players (the US included), and to continue the modernization of Russian defence capabilities (see September 2008 pledges by the Russian President to launch a large-scale construction of warships, including nuclear submarines armed with cruise missiles, and the plans to build a system of air and space defence).

²⁹ The Treaty introduced comprehensive limits on key categories of conventional military equipment, reduced the military forces, imposed the destruction of excess weaponry in Europe, and introduced a regime of mutual verification.

³⁰ The Baltic States are an example. These NATO members are not parties to 1990 CFE Treaty and thus constitute a kind of “free zone”, where NATO allied forces may be deployed at any time. Russia is striving for their accession to CFE Treaty so to guarantee some stability at Russian-Baltic states borders. If this aim is not achieved, it may be more convenient to pull out of the CFE pact. Thus, Russia will not have to respect any limits on its forces on the northern and southern flanks, allowing it to augment them.

4. The Russia – US relations

Misunderstandings between the US and Russia persist. Some define this relationship “as a selective partnership, a compartmented relationship in which cooperation on some issues coexists with competition or disagreements on other issues”³¹. On the part of Washington, the Cold-War rhetoric has been replaced by assertions that Russia is a petro-state, a failed democracy, an authoritarian regime improving its ties with states and non-state actors that threaten US security (such as Iran, Syria, Venezuela) – features that make the establishment of a strategic partnership unlikely. Some Russians even point at Washington’s current inability to assess its priorities and national security threats and consequently to elaborate a new strategy and approach in bilateral relations and at multilateral forums. Russia is just an example. On the one hand, Moscow’s collaboration proves precious in coping with threats such as Iran, the war in Afghanistan or even to some extent the Islamic threat (these are all short-term US foreign policy priorities). On the other hand, Russia’s and the US interests clash in Eurasia – a region crucial for both actors’ military and security strategies³². As for the US, Eurasia is vital if Washington relies exclusively upon its own and NATO forces to defeat the Islamic threat. Washington also strives to promote gas/oil pipelines routes towards Europe bypassing Russia’s territory. In addition, the US presence in Eurasia and in the post-Soviet space as a whole is seen by Russia as an attempt to calm down its ambitions by means of restricting its influence in strategic regions. Interestingly, the presence of NATO and US warships in the Black Sea during the five-day war in August 2008, combined with Ukraine’s President Yuschenko strong support for Georgia and for the US stance on the conflict, was interpreted as a way to weaken Russian naval power. Yet the region is important for the natural riches and the pipelines politics is often exploited as an instrument for exerting political pressure and thus undermining each other’s strengths.

However, the US does not need new enemies and should engage in a positive dialogue with Russia. It may only take advantage of such relationship, as mentioned above, as Moscow may help to address a number of global issues. At present, however, US behaviour is perceived in Moscow as one of a weaker player. Despite the uncertain outcome of the Presidential elections, the US is held accountable for the Georgian president’s irresponsibility in bombing Tskhinvali, playing into Russian hands and allowing Russians to achieve a rapid and clear victory which showed US limits of power. This might reflect divisions within the Bush administration³³. In addition, the US is not in a position to blame Russia after having acted in disregard of international law (Iraq, Guantanamo). The US legitimacy as international leader appears frail. Hence, Russia is one of the natural poles in the multipolar world order arising out of the decline of American unipolarity³⁴. *The Economist* calls it a “...neo-polar world in which old alliances and rivalries are bumping up against each other in new ways”³⁵.

³¹ A.E. STENT, *Restoration and revolution in Putin’s foreign policy*, cit., p. 1096.

³² G. FRIEDMAN, *The Medvedev Doctrine and American Strategy*, STRATFOR, September 2, 2008.

³³ Putin has accused the Bush administration of staging the war to boost John McCain’s election chances.

³⁴ Experts’ Russian Foreign Policy Roundtable, Chatham House, November 2006.

³⁵ *The Economist*, September 13, 2008, p. 40.

Indeed, Russians are trying to introduce a reciprocity in their relations with Americans. This means that Washington will not be allowed any more to ignore Moscow's concerns while expecting the Kremlin to accommodate its international priorities. National interests must be fully respected. Furthermore, Russia's economic power and its continuous insistence on compliance with the provisions of international law as one of the pillars in relations between different countries provides Russia with a number of alternatives in seeking strategic partners. The US options, on the contrary, may result rather limited. Therefore, if Washington aspires "to exploit" Russia as a resource, it should revise its stance on the latter.

Russian call for a multipolar world implies that despite "economic or social problems Russia can still be considered an influential world power centre, since poles may vary in their weight in different spheres, and no country can be most influential in all spheres. Although at present Russia cannot yet be considered the strongest actor in the world economy, it would definitely be an important pole in the sphere of international law. Therefore, creating the image of Russia as an independent pole in the multipolar world can make it easier for the country to reclaim the status of a great power"³⁶.

Russia's central concern is the global order, and this could open a broad area for cooperation with Washington. Russia has already manifested its willingness to support international initiatives involving the US, such as the Six-Party talks on North Korea, the Middle East Quartet, and the operation to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Where the two countries have showed a clear divergence of opinions is Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and NATO Eastward enlargement. These two issues will be the ground where Russia and the new American presidency will test their willingness and ability to work together and introduce a new approach in bilateral relations. Despite the fact that "Russia is disillusioned with the United States and Europe, it is not eager to enter into an alliance against the West"³⁷.

Today, the more pressing security issue is the spread of nuclear weapons technology. This is indeed the field where Russia and the US share their concerns. In addition, Russia stresses the need to promote the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Still, as a participant in the Six-Party talks over North Korea's nuclear weapons program, Russia has supported America's recent negotiating position. Regarding Iran too, "Russia has not interest in seeing its neighbour across the Caspian gain nuclear warheads for its medium-range missiles"³⁸. But it also doubts that in the short-run Iran will acquire such missiles.

Russia's international behaviour is to a great extent conditioned by its economic interests and rising might. US-Russian economic ties are growing stronger even if the level of political confidence sometimes appears weakened. The next US administration should strive to remedy this mismatch. Any drive towards imposing financial or other political sanctions on the Kremlin, as a consequence of its actions in Georgia, may

³⁶ V. FEKLYUNINA, *Battle for perceptions: Projecting Russia in the West*, in «Europe-Asia Studies», Vol. 60, N. 4, June 2008, p. 620.

³⁷ D. SIMES, *Losing Russia. The Costs of Renewed Confrontation*, in «Foreign Affairs», November-December 2007, p. 51.

³⁸ D. TRENIN, *Where US and Russian Interests Overlap*, Carnegie Moscow, May 2008.

appear pointless. It is also the case of Russia's WTO accession. Although joining the organization remains high on Russia's political and economic agenda, the leadership in the Kremlin affirmed that the ambition to enter it will not be satisfied at any cost. The US should realize that Russia's WTO membership may bring direct benefits to US interests. But it would also require Washington to confer on Russia permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status. In discussions of PNTR, trade and economic issues would probably be overwhelmed by concerns over the state of democracy and human rights in Russia. Unless the Russians learn how to manage Washington, and especially the US Congress, to achieve the results they want, PNTR status could be a long way off³⁹.

5. Russo-Chinese relations

After years (mainly the mid-1990s) when Russia perceived China as a threat – the so-called “yellow peril” – at its eastern border due to the illegal Chinese immigration challenging the Russian territorial integrity, the beginning of the 2000s turned out to be a promising period in Russo-Chinese political and economic relations⁴⁰. Yet bilateral ties present a pragmatic and good neighbourly character driven by a mutual political, economic and security convenience. At present, President Medvedev attaches a great importance to bilateral cooperation as his late May 2008 second visit abroad as Russian President confirmed as well as his September 2008 declaration that Russia has enough gas resources to satisfy both Western and Eastern (i.e. Chinese) demand for energy supplies. The Kremlin leadership in fact intends to start diversifying Russian economy and strengthening its markets eastwards. It may be stated that after the priority of strengthening relations with CIS and with Central Asia states, relations with China come second, followed by the traditional Russian EU partners (in particular, Germany, Italy, and France). However, this Chinese economic vector in Russian foreign policy, which is likely to require some time to be fully implemented, does not harm the European orientation of Russia.

Priority in bilateral relations seems to be deepening strategic partnership despite objections from third countries, hinting at the US, collaboration in the sector of banning the deployment of weapons in space and space flights, reinforcing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and developing new types of cooperation within the SCO's framework, including energy, as well as deepening trade relations. Meanwhile, Russia confirms it will continue to export to China military equipment (primarily aircraft and vessels) and to develop collaboration in the high-tech research.

Many scholars point out to the fact that an effective partnership between Russia and China is beneficial for both players. Dmitri Trenin believes that Russia's short-term future will be determined by developments not so much in its Western part but in Siberia and the Far East. These two regions, in fact, are experiencing population

³⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁰ In 2001, however, there was another brief pause of tensions owed to Russia's support for the US following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

shrinking phenomenon and are poorly industrialized⁴¹. Therefore, a closer economic collaboration with China may boost Russian prosperity and territorial economic cohesion. On the other side, Chinese scholars stress that “the geopolitical instincts of the Beijing leadership (suggests that China’s) Eurasian orientation is safer for its foreign policy than a Pacific one”⁴². Summing up these two options, the Russian President states that the desired Russian balanced and multivector foreign policy is due to the geopolitical position of the country, namely as the largest Euro-Asian power. It should also be added that both Russian and Chinese regimes are widely seen as somewhat anti-Western and a stronger collaboration offers a viable alternative to escape lining up with Western partners (while not excluding them at all) and keep going independently with national strategies (i.e. the different understanding of democracy).

Chinese-Russian partnership bears more than just a bilateral significance. They advocate and pursue global collaboration towards establishing a multipolar world. In 1997 the countries signed a Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order, which was confirmed in 2005 when former President Putin signed a Joint Statement on the XXIst Century World Order. Both China and Russia wish to enhance the role of the UN and to emphasize the value of developing a just multipolar world based on international law principles.

However, China differs in some aspects from Russia’s stance on global politics. As Putin’s last presidential terms have clearly indicated, he (and his successor, President Medvedev is likely to follow him) accepts only an order of international affairs where Russia has a primary role in decision-making processes and where its previous great power (Putin even calls it “natural power”) is restored. China, on the contrary, is more keen to follow Deng Xiaoping’s advice on foreign policy, i.e. *keep a low profile and never become a leader*⁴³. Thus, while Moscow is behaving more assertively with the aim of becoming a major international leader, China prefers to avoid the aggressive tones and direct confrontation with Western parties. Its economy is indeed much more dependent on the US (and the US has long-term interests in its development) than the Russian one and therefore Beijing is seeking to acquire more negotiating power while moving closer to its economic and geopolitical goals. Because of these divergent visions, the Russo-Chinese cooperation may be defined as a strategic partnership inspired by pragmatism.

As long as economic relations are concerned, bilateral trade is to flourish⁴⁴ with particular vigour as the two parties agreed to raise the target for official bilateral trade from around \$20 bln in 2004 to \$60-80 bln by 2010. In this framework Russian exports

⁴¹ D. TRENIN, *The end of Eurasia: Russia on the border between geopolitics and globalization*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002, p. 201-202.

⁴² P. FERDINAND, *Sunset, sunrise: China and Russia construct a new relationship*, in «International Affairs», Vol. 83, N. 5, September 2007.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 857.

⁴⁴ Trade between Russia and China increased 44%, year-on-year, in 2007 to \$48.2 bln. Bilateral trade between both countries is to continue to expand rapidly as it increased 39% in January-May 2008, year-on-year, to \$22.1 bln. In 2007 China posted a surplus of \$8.8 bln in trade with Russia for the first time in the past 15 years. Yet China will also build up Russian imports to balance mutual trade. Exports of Chinese electronics and engineering products to Russia in 2007 accounted for about 40% of total exports to Russia (\$10.3 bln) while imports from Russia mostly included energy products and raw materials, which accounted for more than 90%.

will grow dramatically with energy being the primary source of trade. Indeed, Russia may soon become the largest supplier of oil to China. This fits Beijing goals of obtaining 1/3 of its oil imports from Russia and Central Asia by 2020, with 20% coming from Russia. As long as the gas imports are concerned, here too, Russia may become a leading supplier for China. China will need to import 50-80 bln cubic metres per year between 2010-2020. To meet these needs in 2006 China signed with Gazprom a Memorandum of Understanding to build two gas pipelines that would deliver each 30-40 bln cubic metres of gas per year by 2011. Despite the tendency to rely exclusively upon Russia, China is looking for alternatives in case Russia's deliveries are delayed. Beijing signed agreements with Central Asian partners such as Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. This move will certainly increase competition between Russia and China in Central Asia.

Yet Russo-Chinese relations are particularly intricate when it comes to Central Asia. The region is vital in both the political sphere and the energy sector. On the one hand, "Moscow's growing fears of US penetration into its traditional defence perimeter in Central Asia, pushed Moscow to strengthen dialogue with China"⁴⁵. On the other, Russia faces China's competition (as consumer) in buying stakes in energy projects⁴⁶. Russia needs Central Asian energy resources to feed its domestic demand and to export gas to other CIS countries. In this sense, the strategic partnership of China and Russia assumes some critical aspects of suspicion. In the future, "the Central Asian states are poised to emerge as serious competitors to Russia for a share of the Chinese market"⁴⁷. If we assume that Central Asia becomes a region of primary importance for energy supplies, then Moscow should develop an appropriate economic and energy policy towards the region securing its role there. For example, in order to overcome negative scenarios Moscow should develop a coherent strategy for its Far East and start building pipeline net towards China, similar to the one directed to the EU. Yet another option may be to exploit the existing regional organizations in the post-Soviet space (see below), where China does not have a membership.

Russia and China cooperate also in the field of security and economic relations (including banking institutions, too) within the framework of the SCO. But their positions within it differ. Russia sees the SCO as chiefly focused on security issues but China, on the contrary, insists on enlarging its scope so as to include economic cooperation, too (i.e. establishing a free trade area). Such aspirations are dictated by Beijing's desire to facilitate the supply of energy, to assist the development of the western part of the country, and to help remove the low level of development of Central Asia that nourishes extremism. For Beijing, "the SCO is a vehicle for managing China's peaceful rise. Russia views the SCO as a means for maintaining its role in post-Soviet Central

⁴⁵ N. MEHDIYEVA, *New Man in the Kremlin: What Future for Russian Foreign Policy?*, in «The International Spectator», Vol. 43, N. 2, June 2008.

⁴⁶ "Central Asia states are confronted with an increasingly aggressive and unilateralist Russia on one hand, and a divided and weakened transatlantic community on the other. Closeness with Russia is unappealing, as is closeness with the West. Therefore, they are increasingly looking to China and Gulf states as key economic partners". See *Anxious neighbours. The concern of former Soviet states*, IISS Strategic Comments, Vol. 14, Issue 7, September 2008.

⁴⁷ N. MEHDIYEVA, *New Man in the Kremlin*, cit.

Asia, and balancing the influence of China and others"⁴⁸. Moreover, the organization is a mechanism to establish an acceptable mode of regional coexistence between the two rising powers.

Ever since they started cooperating, the members of the SCO have been at pains to emphasize that the organization is not directed against any third party, i.e. it is not challenging the US. It could not even do it since some members do not share the same apprehension of Russia and China towards the US. The aim is rather to further the security of their region, and the security of neighbouring areas. However, it is unlikely to become a military defence bloc as there is no commitment of members to come to the aid of any other member that might be attacked and it lacks supranational institutions.

5.1. The Russia-China-India triangle

This strategic triangle, whose members are also part of the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China), has periodically attracted the ruling elites of these states but it nevertheless does not seem propitious, insofar as each of the three parties signed separate partnerships with the other two, which suggests a long way away from a firm mutual commitment.

Russia's strategic partnership with China and India has considerable limitations, not least the far higher priority Beijing and New Delhi give to the US. In addition, some scholars highlight that in contrast to India and China, the Russian economy is still not innovative – even if it is diversifying⁴⁹.

As to Russian-Indian cooperation, it is mainly centred in the sector of energy with Moscow expressing its interests in large-scale projects to build oil and gas pipelines in India. Bilateral co-operation in the fuel and energy sphere has grown steadily in recent years. India's ONGC is participating in the Sakhalin I oil and gas project and is considering large-scale projects together with the state-controlled oil giant Rosneft in Russia, India and third countries. New Delhi also invited Gazprom to contribute to integrated petrochemicals and power projects in India. Other bilateral relations concern the building of multipurpose transport planes, on setting up joint research centres for non-ferrous metals, biomedical technologies, accelerators and lasers. Russia's Federal Space Agency (Roskosmos) and the Indian Department of Space have signed a joint lunar research and exploration agreement. Banking and engineering are also factors boosting bilateral trade. Trade with India is becoming more diversified with the share of cooperation in the engineering sector being on the rise. Still, in October 2007 Russia and India reaffirmed plans to draft a comprehensive cooperation treaty to boost trade, as well as ties in a range of other areas. The two countries are determined to increase mutual trade to \$10 bln by 2010, expanding cooperation from the traditional military sector to other spheres, including industry, energy and investment.

⁴⁸ O. ANTONENKO, *The EU should not ignore the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Centre for European Reform, Policy Brief May 2007.

⁴⁹ Experts' Russian Foreign Policy Roundtable, Chatham House, November 2006.

6. Russia and the post-Soviet space

The countries in the post-Soviet space are viewed by Russia as its foreign policy foremost priority, a region of Russia's privileged interests. This was confirmed by the first ever visit as Russia's new President that Medvedev made to Kazakhstan in May 2008⁵⁰. Moscow has openly declared its readiness to protect these interests from Western and US intrusions⁵¹ as long as its strategic and historical (military and political) strengths are determined by its influence over the region. Some analysts even talk of Russia's ability to attract neighbouring countries and to integrate them into a regional pole or system. Today, Moscow no longer intends to exert a direct pressure from the top on the policies of these states, but it calls upon those of them which share its economic and foreign policy orientation to unite efforts and to establish a self-sufficient Eurasian pole on the international arena. Yet, long-standing historical and cultural ties allow Russia to be the natural mediator between these states and the West offering them support in economic and political issues.

Notwithstanding, these countries are also the area where differences between Russian and Western (Cold-War) approach to international affairs are colliding the most⁵².

As former President Putin affirmed, after a long period of hesitation and difficulty to find a proper approach, today Russia is able to defend its position in the former USSR area. Indeed, this statement reveals the different stages of the evolution of Moscow's role that have emerged since 1991. In the 1990s the Primakov doctrine was largely applied to the post-Soviet space. According to this doctrine, occurring at a time when Russia was economically and politically weak and hence unable to elaborate an adequate policy *vis-à-vis* the region, Moscow was expected to strictly abide by international law. In 2003, the President of RAO Unified Energy System, Anatolii Chubais, introduced the concept "liberal empire" in Russia's relations with its neighbours. This was built on the following core elements: "promoting Russian culture and defending the rights of Russian speakers; expansion of Russian business; and support of democratic rights and freedoms"⁵³. While accomplishing this "mission", as Chubais defined it, Moscow should not be authoritarian but rather it should respect the sovereignty of those countries and be a source of progress for them. The West interpreted this approach as a Russian attempt to restore its empire over the post-Soviet space. The Kremlin tried hard to persuade the West of the opposite. In a 2007 article⁵⁴ the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, stated that Russian relations with the countries of the near abroad were not guided by imperialistic considerations but rather by the desire to

⁵⁰ Concurrently with the visit, a new federal agency charged with Commonwealth of Independent States affairs emerged as an evidence of the high importance Russia attaches to the region.

⁵¹ This stance reflects the insecurity of Russia's regional role after the Coloured Revolutions and, in particular the Ukrainian one. In the aftermath of these events, Moscow began exploiting any means to prevent attempts for regime change both inside Russia and in these countries.

⁵² A re-launch of the currently suspended talks between Moscow and Brussels on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) could be the framework within which to initiate a constructive dialogue over the region.

⁵³ V. FEKLYUNINA, *Battle for perceptions*, cit., p. 618.

⁵⁴ S. LAVROV, *Nastoiastee i budustee global'noi politiki: vzgliad iz Moskvi*, in «Russia in Global Affairs», N. 2, 2007.

strengthen the historical community and economic interdependence along with security issues.

Any attempt to view those relations as exclusively political was ruled out. Instead, Lavrov pointed out that other international powers were trying to play geopolitical games by advocating the need to promote democracy. According to him democracy, as the West intends it, pushes Russia towards a process that goes straight against its national interests and is an instrument for destabilizing it. At the same time, Western attempts to introduce democratic regimes in the post-Soviet countries is somewhat disruptive of Russia's traditional civilizational closeness with the states of the area. Some scholars highlight the fact that the Bush doctrine of promoting democracy around the world, failing as yet, is even reinforcing anti-Western feelings. On the contrary, "in a half a generation, Russian regional hegemony has ceased to become the independent states' greatest fear. If conditions allow, Russia may again be seen in a positive, protective light"⁵⁵.

Overall, it seems that today Russia is well aware of its interests in the post-Soviet space and is seeking to implement a new course towards those states. The Kremlin stresses that it is not a matter of re-establishing the Russian empire, but simply of preserving legitimate strategic interests. "Russia cannot be denied its own political, military and economic interests there, and its policy can be an effort to preserve existing influence in the region for the purpose of its greater stabilization, rather than imperial control"⁵⁶.

It is not unusual to hear from Western analysts that, given Moscow's inability to alter the political courses embarked on in former Soviet Republics, it is exploiting its growing economic (energy) power to regain its previous control. Similar statements, however, do not correspond to the entire truth. Undoubtedly, Moscow displays a certain sensitiveness and apprehension towards its neighbours (i.e., NATO eastward enlargement or the Coloured Revolutions). These countries were until very recently a part of the Soviet Union and are hence still interdependent with Russia. They have a similar bureaucratic apparatus and share economic structures, which makes them a fundamental element for the development of the Russian economy. In fact, Moscow's attempt to strengthen its influence in the post-Soviet space is largely dictated by the purpose of establishing a solid and extensive economic partnership area, taking advantage of existing similarities between the economic systems and their sector-based specializations.

Following the USSR's disintegration, Russia created regional organizations aimed at economic and defence cooperation (see below). In the latter case, Russia still controls the regional "security architecture" as it is the owner of key assets of the post-Soviet military infrastructure. Certainly, the organizations were meant to offset the influence of extra-regional actors, but it should not be ruled out that in the future these groupings develop far reaching new policies, encompassing other regional actors. Such evolution will also depend on Russia's ability to adapt its interests to external policies like the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the way it will engage with the latter, while

⁵⁵ A. WEINSTEIN, *Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization*, in «The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations», Winter/Spring 2007.

⁵⁶ V. FEKLYUNINA, *Battle for perceptions*, cit., p. 620.

avoiding that the region becomes a new dividing line between itself and the West. The adjustment of policies may require both Russia and the West to take measures or to adopt attitudes that would diminish the conflict potential both within the region and in relation with the rest of the world. The West, and in particular the EU, should recognize that a mediatory role in that space can only take place in coordination with Russia if frictions are to be shunned. Moreover, following the Georgia crisis it became evident that Russia feels much more comfortable talking with Brussels than with Washington, which offers the former an opportunity to emerge as an independent and stronger international player in the region.

Besides trade and defence aspects, the area concerns bilateral and multilateral relations in the realm of energy supplies (the region is a battlefield between Moscow and the US in trying to acquire a major share of Caspian gas and oil resources to be delivered to the EU); limiting the threat of Islamic extremism and drug trafficking, especially in Central Asia; and tackling the problem of peace settlement of the “frozen conflicts”. The latter constitute the legacy of the collapse of the USSR and are instrumental in Russia’s re-gaining its previous net of privileged relations. However, after the recent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and following the signing of treaties between the two republics and Russia, guaranteeing to the former protection in case of attack, but also allowing Moscow to build military bases and to station there additional troops, any attempt in the short-term to break the new status quo appears unlikely. Given the modified regional strategic architecture, it will take time for world powers to re-assert and to design their spheres of influence taking into account Moscow’s claims.

6. 1. Organizations in the post-Soviet space

We can speak of two broad trends in Russian relations with its post-Soviet neighbours. Some of them wish to strengthen security, economic, and informal political partnership with Russia, while others maintain a pro-Western, anti-Russian⁵⁷ political orientation. Russia, in turn, responds positively to the first camp and quite negatively to the second. The organizations belonging to the first are: the CIS⁵⁸, the Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC)⁵⁹, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)⁶⁰, while the organization fitting the latter characteristics is GUAM⁶¹.

⁵⁷ Washington’s support and meddling in the domestic affairs of the member states of this organization seriously damages these countries’ relations with Russia.

⁵⁸ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) consists of eleven former Soviet Republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan discontinued permanent membership as of August 2005, and is now an associate member. CIS was created in 1991.

⁵⁹ The EURASEC was created in 2000 and comprises six members: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine have an observer status.

⁶⁰ The CSTO grew out of the framework of the CIS and was initially established in 1992 (coming into effect in 1994) as CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) for a term of five years. In 2002 was signed the Charter of the new Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Its current members are: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

⁶¹ GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development comprises Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova and was established in 2001.

Three of the members of the only economic framework, EURASEC, decided to establish a unified Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in the first half of 2010. In October 2007 they signed a package of agreements comprising the legal basis of the Customs Union. The ultimate goal was to create a EURASEC common economic space. However, lately this initiative turned out to be unfeasible.

Together with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the CIS and the CSTO are all aimed at security issues (the CSTO has three areas of action: Central Asia, Europe and the South Caucasus). They are deemed to be effective mechanisms for coordination and collaboration in the implementation of commonly agreed goals. Russia being the leading force of the organizations (an exception is made for the SCO), the groupings automatically are also means for the realization of its politics. Where Russia failed is in the fact that the functions of these groupings often overlap (both in their tasks and in their geographical reach) as do their organs, in consequence. Some see the CSTO as being somewhat overshadowed by the SCO since the latter is addressing security issues more effectively than the former. The CSTO thus forms a general security framework and risks further limiting its scope of action⁶². Given this conflicting situation, in October 2007 the General Secretaries of CSTO and SCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing to consult each other, exchange information, participate in each other's activities, and promote active cooperation. This functional parallelism and the general lack of coordination between the different groupings confirm that thesis that there is no holistic Russian regional integrationist project and this reality wanes Moscow's regional ambitions⁶³.

So far, we can draw the conclusion that future configuration of the post-Soviet space will sway between Russian friends (those who seek to deepen economic and security partnership with Moscow) and other Russian neighbours, whose stance will be determined not so much by national political determination but rather by international powers' influence. The position of the latter group may oscillate between the status of foes and that of being just neutral to Russia⁶⁴.

Along with the above mentioned organizations, there are also others such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (aimed at strengthening the integration processes in the Black Sea region) and the group of the five Caspian Sea littoral states, including Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Iran, which is likely to increase its role given the importance of the Caspian Sea natural resources. In fact, the latter organization seeks to introduce a normative framework regulating future exploration of the Caspian natural riches and preserving regional security. As President Medvedev has recently emphasized, the Caspian region is going to acquire a greater significance for Russian economic development.

7. Russia and the Arctic Pole race

⁶² I.A. SAFRANCHUK, *Konkurenchiya za bezopasnost' Central'noi Azii*, in «Russia in Global Affairs», N. 6, November-December 2007.

⁶³ A. KAZANTSEV, *Russian policy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea Region*, in «Europe-Asia Studies», Vol. 60, N. 6, August 2008, p. 1078.

⁶⁴ Other scenarios are offered in C. WELT, *Russia and its Post-Soviet Neighbours, Alternative Futures for Russia to 2017*, CSIS Report, November 2007.

Russia completed a successful expedition to the North Pole in August 2007 combining scientific and geopolitical goals of securing Russian priority rights on developing natural resources of much of the Arctic Ocean region, while strengthening its legal claims to the gas and oil deposits thought to lie beneath the Arctic sea floor.

Indeed, Russian scientists are looking for evidence that the Lomonosov Ridge – a 1,2 mln sq km underwater mountain that crosses the polar region which is believed to contain up to 10 bln tons of hydrocarbons, as well as diamonds and metal ores – is a geological extension of Russia's Siberian continental platform, and therefore can be claimed by Russia under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Under the Convention, which sets out legal rules for all activities in the oceans and seas, a country can claim exclusive economic rights within 200 miles. Despite the vagueness of the Convention with regard to possible exceptions of the 200 miles-rule, if a country can prove that its continental shelf extends beyond the 200-mile economic zone, it can claim similar rights over a larger area. Russia first presented its claim to the Arctic Ocean seabed to the UN in 2001, but it was turned down due to the lack of scientific evidence. Moscow now has time until 2009 to prove that its shelf is actually an extension of the Siberian continental platform in order to extend the delineation of its continental shelf beyond the 200-mile zone. Gazprom, which is the direct beneficiary from such an exploration, is already elaborating a number of programs for the exploitation of the expected natural resources. This "patriotically-tinted geographical expedition", as it was defined, visibly attracted criticism from rival Arctic powers, among which Canada, Denmark and the US whose shores face the northern polar ocean for the Arctic's icebound riches. Denmark hopes to prove that the Lomonosov Ridge is an extension of the Danish territory of Greenland. Canada, which has also claimed part of the Arctic shelf since 1925, plans to spend \$7 bln to build and operate up to 8 Arctic patrol ships in a bid to assert its sovereignty. The US Congress is considering measures to upgrade and expand its fleet of polar icebreakers. Washington also plans to sign the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Moscow backed its claim by military exercises. In August 2007 Russia's strategic aviation units began military flights over the North Pole and started to conduct test launches of cruise missiles. In addition, in 2007 Russia announced the development of an Arctic project. In August 2007 Russia's environmental watchdog, Rosprirodnadzor, approved plans to create a "Russian Arctic" national park. It would involve 8.4 mln hectares of land, mainly portions of the Novaya Zemlya archipelago, and 6.1 mln hectares of territorial waters. The national park is due to be launched by 2010.

The risk of an expansionist race for the exploitation of the Arctic natural riches is due to the lack of legally established regime intended to regulate the delimitation borders, analogous to the 1959 Washington Treaty regulating possible sovereignty claims over the Antarctic Pole. In fact, the Treaty prohibits any expansionist claims and establishes a mechanism of strong control over any kind of activities among which are the exploitation of natural resources and military actions. Under the Convention, the coastal states may extend their sovereignty beyond the 200-nautical miles exclusively with regard to the mineral resources on and below the seabed. The Convention however prescribes that such claims should be filed within 10 years after the ratification, as is the case of Russia which ratified it in 1997. Its first claim was submitted in 2001, and the current one is treated as a resubmission. It is interesting to

observe that as the Lomonosov Ridge spans the whole ocean basin, in other terms it is connected to Russia on the one side, and on the other, to Greenland (administered by Denmark) and Canada. These two states may file the same claim on the ridge but from the other end. In fact, Canada, which ratified the Convention in 2003, has to submit its own claim by 2013. The US has never ratified the Convention, limiting its status to an observer. This indeed affects its ability to make future sovereignty claims in the Arctic or elsewhere.

These considerations confirm Russia's multivector pragmatic foreign policy. The control of this region is deemed strategic for the country's economic diversification and ability to lead world economic competition throughout the next years. Yet Moscow's claims in the Arctic pole are linked to the establishment of an adequate transport and social infrastructure, of communication net, the strengthening of programs boosting the use of new technologies. It is yet another example of how economic interests are entrenched with geopolitical ones ultimately seen as a path to the resurrection of Russia's power.

8. Conclusions and policy recommendations

Russia and the West

- “As with many other nations, ‘the sources of Russian conduct toward the outside world encompass multiple, interconnected continuities and differences, dynamic along with (relatively) static features. Notions of identity, orientation and “destiny” are conditioned by long-term realities such as geographical location, historical insecurities, and strategic culture, but they also evolve (or become “modernized”) in response to changing requirements and conditions, internal as well as external”⁶⁵.
- The West needs to come to terms with the fact that Russia has deeply changed. The new resurgent Russia is not planning to be a threat to the West but primarily to improve its domestic situation by assuring economic growth. To become a post-modern great power it is necessary to consolidate as an economic power. In recent years, Russia has developed a more mercantilist rather than imperialist posture towards international politics.
- The West keeps a conservative mindset in dealing with Moscow and tends to interpret its foreign policy through the old Cold-War antagonist scheme. The West is thus conservative and a victim of history. Russia has been forced to look forward and to rebuild its international position almost from scratch.
- As Gvosdev put it, “To get Russia right, we must seek to understand it as it understands itself, not as we might wish it to be”⁶⁶. Russia should not be seen as a menace that needs to be contained but rather as a partner to be engaged.
- What are the chances of transforming coercive diplomacy into cooperative diplomacy? This primarily depends on the West's capacity of understanding Russia, whose assertiveness is often misperceived. It is generally considered

⁶⁵ D. TRENIN, B. LO, *The landscape of Russian Foreign Policy*, cit., p. 19.

⁶⁶ N.K. GVOSDEV, *The sources of Russian conduct*, cit., p.1.

the fruit of an antagonist and hostile posture while it is rather the outcome of a more solid position conquered from the late 1990s. The first post-Soviet foreign Minister, Andrey Kozyrev, had already announced that Russia was about to turn into a “normal great power”⁶⁷.

- The West should accept the relativism of the concept of democracy. This does not mean being accommodating with all the consequences of the concept of “sovereign democracy” but accepting that democracy consolidation has different timings and patterns of implementation. As Rumer points out, “Perhaps the most important thing for Western policy on Russian domestic affairs is the necessity of taking the long view, of fully internalizing the idea that change in Russia will take generations”⁶⁸.
- Russia does not accept any Western intrusion in its domestic politics and condemns the same in its former Republics. To a larger extent sovereignty implies also that Russia wants to be treated as an equal partner and to set a partnership on the Kremlin’s terms. As Trenin explains these terms are: “accept us as we are, without meddling in our internal affairs; treat us as equals; we will do business where our interests meet, but when differences arise, only compromise solutions are acceptable. We won’t follow your lead”⁶⁹. This is about using coercive diplomacy for ensuring the “right terms for cooperation”⁷⁰.
- The EU seems to overlook Russia’s economic potential and tends to focus on its presumed democratic regression. This approach might be fallacious and risks undermining the EU approach towards Russia.
- Russia does not appear as a declining power enjoying a temporary revival but rather as a rising power trying to consolidate its position by broadening its portfolio of friends, power resources, means of influence.
- Russia’s overplaying its energy card has been misunderstood as neo-imperial ambitions rather than a predictable and rational policy meant to establish a more equitable system of international relations. In some cases what is considered a political blackmail responds instead to an economic logic (raising oil and gas prices to a market level).
- In relation to the West it can be simply asserted that positive western policies prompt positive Russian responses, while unfriendly moves – US missile shield, NATO enlargement, recognition of Kosovo’s independence – foster negative anti-Western sentiment not only in the political elite but also among Russian people. The West can force Russia into commitments such as OECD and WTO; put emphasis on rules and adherence to them. The West can use these organisations as a way to press Russia to make reforms in sensitive policies.

⁶⁷ A. KOZYREV, *Russia: A chance for survival*, cit., p.10.

⁶⁸ E.B. RUMER, *Russian Foreign Policy*, cit., p. 83.

⁶⁹ D. TRENIN, *Russia Coercive Diplomacy*, Carnegie Moscow Center Briefing, Vol.10, Issue 1, Moscow Carnegie Center, January 2008.

⁷⁰ Moscow’s expertise on the EU has significantly progressed making Russians tougher negotiators than in 1994 when the PCA was signed.

As a result, Russia will converge towards the Western system making dialogue easier.

- Nevertheless, the West should be aware of Russia's tactical use of inclusive multilateralism (the primacy of the UN, democratization of IR, a new just world order).
- As Russia recovered from the chaos and the deep crisis of the 1990s, one of its priorities became regaining its military status. Therefore, a massive investment is underway aimed at modernizing the obsolete Soviet military equipment and armaments. But Moscow does not hide this process and its numerous demonstrations and tests of new weapons are meant to show the world in an open manner its intentions. Such a policy should not be deemed as prompted by imperialistic or Cold-War logics. It is rather an ordinary evolution of military affairs of a previous great power at a time of rapid globalization and militarization.
- Russia links its military renaissance to the rules of the international law and strives for its due implementation and respect. Its declarations or deeds of withdrawal from some international or regional treaties is a reaction to the unwillingness of other players to abide by the pact's provisions. It is also likely that similar steps continue to be undertaken in the future as world military scenarios differ significantly from those when the treaties were signed. Instead, new negotiations may be launched where the assertive Russia will try to lay down new rules of power and balance in international relations. Being included again among the decision-makers is thus of primary importance for strengthening Russia's international role.
- Russia has exhibited an innovative and creative foreign policy. Two factors have contributed to it: Russia is less "ideologized" than the West (it does not demand that others be democracies); it can count on oil and gas for increasing its leverage. In this way Russia has reached out to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, all ruled by conservative regimes that the Soviet Union had either ignored or considered as adversaries. This obviously qualifies Russia for US and EU engagement.
- In general, with energy issues dominating Moscow's international agenda, at a time when resorting to military power can be too costly and unsuccessful, Russia is a palatable partner, equipped with soft means, with whom to share responsibilities in unstable world regions.

Russia, the US and the EU

- Although Russia's newfound assertiveness and heavy-handed conduct at home and abroad have been the major causes of mutual disillusionment, the US bears considerable responsibility for the weakening of the relationship. US policymakers made some fundamental errors in managing Russia's transition from an expansionist communist empire to a more traditional great power.

- Despite numerous opportunities for strategic cooperation over the past years, America's diplomatic behaviour has left the impression that making Russia a strategic partner has never been a major priority. The administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush assumed that when they needed Russian cooperation, they could secure it without special effort or accommodation. The Clinton administration in particular appeared to view Russia like a post-war Germany, i.e. as a country that could be forced to follow the US policies and would eventually learn to like them. Russia was transformed, not defeated. This profoundly shaped its responses to Washington.
- Since the USSR's disintegration, Russia has not acted like a client state, a reliable ally, or a true friend, but nor has it behaved like an enemy, much less an enemy with imperialistic ambitions led by a hostile ideology. In order to avoid that today's Russia becomes indeed an enemy the next American president must understand where his predecessors went wrong and try to start with appropriately collaborative steps.
- Russia thinks that the US will remain for a while the leading power, but also that its leverage has dramatically reduced after Iraq. Russia can profit from a growing global hostility to American hegemonism. Russia is emerging as another kind of power, gaining consensus also among Islamic countries despite Chechnya.
- Russia is presenting itself as a mediator in world crises. After the end of the ideologization of the IS, Russia can be a mediator of different civilizations and a bridge between the West and the rest of the world. The pro-Kremlin analyst Vladimir Frolov underlines that "A consensus has formed in Russia to the effect that Russia can't be integrated into Western structures. And there is no opening for us to be integrated into the East. This means that Russia is destined to remain an independent centre of power, whether or not it wants to. It will have to rely on its own code of civilization, doing its best to establish equally distant or equally close relations with other centres of power"⁷¹
- The West should watch out for Russia's ability to fill a vacuum. The EU would also be suited for competing or cooperating with Russia in many strategic areas. This is the reason why once more Russia should be considered as an opportunity rather than a threat. The revival of the Russian backed 'geopolitical triangle' of Russia, the EU and the United States might be useful for managing world developments.
- The EU should reconsider its institutionalism while confronting Russia with more realism in terms of objectives, opportunities and means.
- In the greater Middle East, for example, the US could work with Russia on the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So far, Russia has been supporting the work of the Quartet and also generally of US peace efforts in the region.

⁷¹ V. FROLOV, *Cho dlya zapad poslie Mjunchena?*, Izvestia, February 28, 2007 quoted by L. SHEVTSOVA, *Post-communist Russia: a historic opportunity missed*, in «International Affairs», Vol. 83, N. 5, 2007, p. 902.

Russian cooperation would be indispensable in making progress toward a Syrian-Israeli peace deal, and Moscow can be very useful in efforts to stabilize Lebanon⁷².

- The West needs to be clearer when talking to Russia. To this effect, the EU, in particular, needs to come out with a truly uniform strategy overcoming internal divisions. Russia has difficulty dealing with a fragmented actor such as the EU. Russia's preference for bilateralism does not simply respond to a "*divide et impera*" principle but it is also due to the EU's lack of a common vision in its external relations⁷³. Furthermore, Russia does not trust a post-modern political construction such as the EU, preferring bilateralism in its relations with the EU members.
- Russia is reluctant to comply with EU requests because they are against the country's strategic interests (see the refusal to sign the Energy Charter Treaty). The EU is not in the position to exert conditionality on Russia since membership is not at stake. Because of its energy dependency the EU has not a strong bargaining power. In addition, Russia in the long run is likely to find alternative markets and partners.
- If the EU wants Russia to become a friendly neighbour, it should abandon an "orthodox" approach in favour of a cooperative attitude. As in the past, Brussels should follow a functionalist approach: focusing on low politics specific issues. A holistic approach, demanding that Russia review its domestic orientations while renouncing its global goals, should be avoided.
- The best the EU can do is to favour Russian convergence in many policy area issues. This would de-politicize their tense relations while favouring growing similarities. Legislative approximation can contribute to open up Russia, to improve governance and ultimately to erode statism and all its implications. Nevertheless, the EU should not overlook tense situations such as Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh: these are to be tackled before something similar to the Georgian crisis erupts.

Russia, China and India

- There is no doubt that Russo-Chinese relations have been transformed in the last years. Both Russia and China have shown a determination to pursue a constructive relationship despite the fact that they have found it difficult to resolve their disagreements over the supply of energy from Russia to China – the single most important economic element in their relationship and potentially still the most divisive. They both indeed recognize that mutual strength is the most suitable basis for solid relations. The people of the Russian Far East still

⁷² See D. TRENIN, *Where US and Russian Interests Overlap*, cit., p. 221.

⁷³ On the EU divisions in relation to Russia, see M. LEONARD, N. POPESCU, *A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations*, European Council on Foreign Relations, London, November 2007 (www.ecfr.eu) and the study carried out by the EU-Russia Centre, *The Bilateral Relations of EU member States with Russia*, Brussels, October 2007, <http://www.eu-russiacentre.org/home.asp?id=107>.

feel somewhat neglected or forgotten by Moscow. Nevertheless, a Russia that is recovering economic strength holds out the prospect that it will be better able to stand by its Far East.

- Without an effective and much strengthened trading relationship, there would be little chance for this relationship to become one of the most important for either of the partners. Therefore, Russia is determined to pursue greater collaboration. The Chinese government, on its part, has occasionally floated the idea of Russia and China forming a single “economic space”, following the model of the common economic space between Russia and the EU.
- Both Russia and China want an enhanced place for the UN in dealing with world affairs. Their repeated calls for multipolarity will represent a stronger challenge to western leadership than seemed likely in 2000, when Putin took office and called for integration with Europe. But they also expect a more prominent role for the big states in the world outside the UN.
- The SCO should provide a more substantial basis for long-term cooperation between Moscow and Beijing. For China the grouping represents its first attempt in recent times at taking the lead in inaugurating an international organization. For Russia it embodies the value that Russia is a Eurasian as opposed to a purely European power, even though this does not necessarily mean it will shun the West. Yet, since the SCO members have agreed not to join an alliance that might prejudice the security interests of any other member, a NATO membership for Russia seems highly unlikely apart from other considerations. The sensitivities of the Central Asian partners, who do not want to see their independence overridden by their much larger neighbours to the north and the south, represent however a challenge for China and Russia. Finally, for both Moscow and Beijing the SCO marks the first attempt to develop a relationship based upon partnership into a stronger mutual commitment.
- The West should also get used to dealing with Russia through the organizations to which it belongs, such as the SCO. In the six years of its existence, SCO has already achieved some concrete results in areas such as security co-operation, common economic projects and the harmonization of laws. The EU in particular could use Russia as a bridge for acquiring leverage in the area.
- If the SCO managed to realize its ambitious economic integration agenda, including the creation of a free-trade zone and a set of rules for the free movement of goods, services and technologies, a strong EU-SCO relationship would thus bring the Europeans major trade and investment opportunities. Since SCO has competence on energy matters, it could become relevant for Europe’s energy security. The membership includes two of the largest global energy producers outside OPEC, Russia and Kazakhstan, as well as two of the largest consumers, China and India. Neither China nor Russia views the EU as a challenge in Central Asia. Thus, the EU and the SCO are not destined to become rivals in the region.

Russia and the post-Soviet space

- Russia achieves its national interests through global cooperation and healthy economic competition while respecting sovereignty and independence. Russia is well aware that it would be too costly, not adequate to today's international relations order as well as its own interests, to rebuild and maintain an empire. It is more convenient to respect its neighbours, albeit not renouncing to exert influence while preventing the West from becoming a competitor force.
- Russia will continue to focus its primary attention on the near abroad, which represents a priority of its foreign policy. However, to preserve its influence there it will have to compete with the United States and the EU, and in general with Western structures such as NATO, the Council of Europe, OSCE. Its political elite is united in seeing Russia as a key player in post-Soviet Eurasia considering the crucial role these countries play for the Russian economy and its trade with the EU in the energy sector.
- Russia will give a boost to regional organizations as they are its balancing means for preserving national security, territorial integrity and economic prosperity.
- While not recognizing the "independence" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EU and US should work with Russia to help resolve the remaining frozen conflicts of the former Soviet space (Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh).

Postscript, 22 September 2008

This paper was mostly completed before the long protracted Georgian-Ossetian conflict reached a new climax in the "five-day war" of August 2008. We felt that it did not need any major revision since nothing we have been arguing has been questioned by the latest events but rather corroborated. Russia is in search of a new international identity reflecting its new status. Foreign policy is not conceived as a determinant factor for gaining domestic political consensus. The war in Georgia did not serve the Russian political elite needs in terms of internal legitimacy. Russia responded immediately, after a long-term military build-up, with a "massive counter-attack"⁷⁴ in defence of its own interests. Without the provocation of an irresponsible Saakashvili, Moscow would have not acted militarily in South Ossetia. The war damaged Russia too by tarnishing its international image and making its accession to both WTO and OECD tougher while its main priority remains to consolidate its economic performance and to be integrated into the global market. We believe that isolating Moscow can be dangerous for the reactions it might produce and because the West needs Russia on many fronts. Looking at Russia with a Cold-War mindset does not help develop a civil society with well-informed opinions, on the contrary nationalism might be revitalized. In this sense

⁷⁴ The term has been used in the European Parliament resolution of 3 September 2008 on the situation in Georgia, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0396+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

too, Europe has proved a weak and divided actor. The pro-Americanism of some EU member states prevents the EU from playing an independent role in the reshaping of pan-European security, including smoothing tensions with Moscow. We recommend a twin-track approach: showing unity when demanding respect for the rules and a skilful engaging strategy. Europe has no great leverage but it can certainly profit from partnership with Russia.

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