

## 11. *Nato and Russia in the Post-Wall Europe*

by *Sergei Medvedev, Igor Tomashov*

Looking at the entire complex of Russia-West interactions in the wake of the Cold War, relations between Russia and NATO have been one of its most perplexing components. They have come a long way, and they have followed a complicated trajectory, with ups and downs. In the twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO-Russia relations have always been high on the Russia-West agenda, often as a major stumbling block, and sometimes as an evidence of positive shifts. On balance, an organization with its own goals and internal logic, NATO has successfully played a role of an interface between Russia and the West, engaging Russia in a (sometimes controversial) dialogue on security, military and political issues, and giving Russia a voice in European and global affairs. And although this voice has often been critical, and at times hysterical, Russia's position has always been communicated to Western elites.

In the early 1990s, the prevailing Liberal ideology maintained that after the collapse of the Soviet Union NATO would become an international institutional regime, "civilizing" the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, streamlining civil-military relations and ensuring a more stable transition to democracy. Based on the experience of the accession of Italy in 1949, Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982, this assumption proved to be partially true. In fact, the prospect of joining NATO and the EU has been a major incentive for political and economic reform in the "New Europe". But the case of Russia, a country without a clear "vocation for membership", has turned out to be much more complex. As Dmitri Trenin put it,

«one must indeed admit that the architecture of European security created in the 1990s has proven to be unsuccessful. The West hoped that Europe could be organized around the NATO-EU pair, which would naturally "attract" other countries and regions that gravitate toward the Atlantic alliance and the EU,

while Russia would be satisfied with formal partnerships with both institutions. The latter assumption proved ill-founded. The policy of "engaging Russia" first sputtered, then helplessly spun its wheels, and finally came to a halt»<sup>1</sup>.

However, it would be too simplistic to interpret NATO-Russia relations in the past 20 years as a crisis of expectations and as a steady decline. It was a dramatic curve with rises and falls rather than a straight line. The short idealistic period in the early 1990s, with hopes of Russia's membership in NATO and the EU and rhetoric of a "common European home", ended with the first signs of NATO enlargement in 1993–1994. The war in Kosovo in 1999 led to a serious crisis in NATO-Russia relations and to a temporary freeze of contacts – only a year after the establishment of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) in 1998. A new quality of relations, which originally seemed to signify a fundamental pro-Western turn in Russian foreign policy after the 9/11 attacks, turned out to be no more than a tactical move intended to institutionalize new forms of cooperation between Russia and NATO. The war in South Ossetia in 2008 showed that NATO enlargement into Ukraine and Georgia may seriously undermine not only the relations between Russia and NATO but European stability in general.

The aim of this chapter is to take stock and make a critical reassessment of NATO-Russia relations in the post-Soviet period. Starting from the assumption that NATO has been one of the most important mechanisms of engaging Russia in the dialogue with the West, it examines the formats and contents of this dialogue and the concrete achievements of cooperation in political and military spheres.

### 1. *The Early 1990s: a Partnership that Wasn't*

The end of the Cold War resulted in fundamental changes in European security. Indeed, this was the breakup, rather than the emergence, of the common security environment. During the latter half of the 20th century, European security had been shaped by the dominant East-West standoff and built around the East-West axis. The Soviet Union had eventually become part of Europe as a European problem, its presence on the continent could be measured in manpower, tanks, members of Communist

<sup>1</sup> Trenin D., *Moscow the Muscular: The Loneliness of an Aspiring Power Center*, Carnegie Moscow Center Briefing, 11, 1, January 2009, [http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/briefings/TreninBr\\_Eng\\_11\\_1\\_09\\_web.pdf](http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/briefings/TreninBr_Eng_11_1_09_web.pdf).

parties and miles of barbed wire. In a strange way, these divisions had created a common security context, and had given birth to some common solutions: containment, deterrence, the arms race, and later the Ostpolitik, détente, and the CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe). The whole relationship was based on confrontation, but there was common ground for a relationship, a unity of opposites.

The collapse of the communist project has destroyed this system. The rapid change in Central and Eastern Europe; the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and ethnic conflicts in the successor states were all challenges for the West. European security became a process rather than a system of institutions. Change was in the air.

At these crossroads of the late 1980s and early 1990s, political elites in both East and West were eagerly entertaining alternative projects of reforms and most daring views of the future. It was a time of the unraveling international system; at that point, the urgency of doing something, the imperative of action, was more important than thinking about the long-term consequences. Making hasty deals with their Western partners, the Soviet leaders reached only informal agreements with Western leaders that NATO would not expand eastwards; at the same time, the possibility of Soviet and later Russia's membership of NATO was considered by the Kremlin quite seriously. Then US Secretary of State James Baker mentioned that Mikhail Gorbachev, Eduard Shevardnadze and Boris Yeltsin had all several times spoken to him about the prospects of Russia joining NATO<sup>2</sup>. Moreover,

«in December 1991, Boris Yeltsin, whose government was not yet even universally recognized, dispatched a message to the session of the North Atlantic Council in which he bluntly raised the issue of Russia's membership in the Alliance. In a few days, Russia's foreign ministry explained that a clerk had missed the word "not" in the final version of the document: "today, we are not raising the issue of Russia's membership [...]"<sup>3</sup>.

The peak of the pro-Western cycle in Russia's domestic politics was early 1992, when shock liberalization took place, devised with the help of Western consultants (price liberalization, mass privatization, etc.). Russia's foreign and security policies more or less followed suit, and it was during these months that Russia seriously regarded the feasibility of NATO membership. Democracy was a prevailing ideology at the period, and there

<sup>2</sup> Baker J.A., *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992*, New York, 1995, pp. 251, 253, 572.

<sup>3</sup> Glinski-Vassiliev D., *To Join Or Not To Join? NATO and Russia's Ruling Class*, Antiwar.com, 29 March 2000, <http://www.antiwar.com/orig/vassiliev1.html>.

were virtually no, or very few, political obstacles for accepting Western influence. There was a certain ideal model, and patented external controllers (possessing of economic instruments) that supervised Russia's progress on the way towards this model. There had been an opportunity of a "soft" integration of Russia into the Western economic and eventually the security regime.

But this window of opportunity which existed in early 1992 turned out to be short-lived in the situation of economic hardship and growing political tension in the country. Russia's advances to NATO were not welcomed or appreciated by the Western elites, which themselves struggled to adapt to the new geopolitical situation. The West treated Russia differently from Central and East European countries and applied, in the words of Lilia Shevtsova, a "Marxist" paradigm of Russia's transformation: priority was given to the development of market economy rather than of the stable democratic institutions<sup>4</sup>. NATO has failed to become a factor of Russia's transition either as a stimulus or as facilitator of reforms (as was case in the countries with "a vocation of membership"), or as a reliable partner.

## 2. The Mid-1990s: End of Illusions, Start of Debate

NATO enlargement was not a foregone conclusion at the end of the Cold War. But as soon as the dust of the collapse of the Soviet bloc had settled, the logic of political developments started working towards these ends. According to Dmitri Glinski-Vassiliev there were several reasons for NATO enlargement, both of domestic and international political nature<sup>5</sup>. Firstly and most importantly, it was NATO's crisis of identity and a threat to its internal unity. In fact, the dissolution of the Soviet Union undermined the legitimacy of NATO's original mission, namely the collective defense against external military threat. In addition to this, European countries started to envisage alternative projects of European security after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. «NATO as a bureaucratic institution and a community of military and political elites faced a prospect of steady

<sup>4</sup> "Rossiya i Zapad" ("Russia and the West"). The discussion in Liberal Mission Foundation, 3 January 2009, [http://liberal.ru/Discussions\\_DisplayDiscussion.asp?Rel=243](http://liberal.ru/Discussions_DisplayDiscussion.asp?Rel=243).

<sup>5</sup> Glinski-Vassiliev D., "Rasshireniye NATO na vostok kak problema rossiiskoi i evropeiskoi bezopasnosti" ("NATO Eastward Enlargement as a Russian and European Security Problem"), in Trenin D. (ed.), *Russia and European Security Institutions: Entering the 21st century*, Carnegie Moscow Center, June 2000, pp. 101–131.

disappearance or disintegration»<sup>6</sup>. The solution to this problem was in some sense bureaucratic: enlargement became a sort of mission in itself.

Then, it was the deficit of legitimacy of democratic regimes in Central and Eastern European countries. Defeat of the right parties at the elections in Hungary and Poland threatened the positions of democratic elites and prospects of reforms. Joining NATO and following integration into the EU were seen as the guarantees of securing their place in the new world order. On the other side of the Atlantic, NATO enlargement has reflected the growth of the Eastern European lobby in the US politics. The activities of such organizations as the Polish American Congress and the Central and Eastern European coalition have contributed to the decision, favorable for the respective countries.

Last but not least, NATO enlargement was the result of the negative image of Russia in the West and mistakes made by Russia's diplomacy and politicians. For Russia, the issue of NATO enlargement was especially sensitive. There has been precious little support to the liberal argument that NATO enlargement is not a threat to the country's security, because it is in Russia's best interest to see at its Western frontier a belt of friendly and domestically stable states, bound by firm discipline and collective responsibility in the framework of NATO. Instead, Russia's politicians opted for a strategy of damage limitation, "downgrading" and conditioning the first wave of NATO enlargement, thus limiting the assumed damage of NATO policies, and delaying, or altogether preventing its second wave. However, as argued by Sergei Karaganov, this strategy had a serious weakness: it treated enlargement as a *fait accompli* and sought to influence the situation by groundless threats and by limiting the dialogue with the Alliance. As a result, Russia reached the contrary effect, further pushing the process of enlargement<sup>7</sup>.

Political bargaining around NATO enlargement continued in 1994–1997 and ended with the signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security in May 1997 in Paris, ahead of the NATO summit in Madrid in July 1997 inviting the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to begin accession talks with NATO. The taste of Russia's geopolitical defeat was sweetened, but this could not deny the fact that the most powerful military organization in the world moved one step closer to the Russian borders.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101; Karaganov S., *Speshit' Rossii poka ne sleduet* (For the Time Being, Russia Should Not Hurry), «Nezavisimaya gazeta», 27 February 1997.

Understanding this fact, one has to admit that the space for Russia's diplomatic maneuver was seriously limited. Vitally dependent on the exports of raw materials to the West, Russia simply could not afford political and rhetorical isolationism, let alone outright confrontation with the West. In a wider sense, in the 1990s Russia had already carried out its foreign policy in a global environment very much influenced by Western values and institutions. It might have been unenthusiastic about this environment, it might have taken a detached view and a separate stand within this order, it might have even tried to modify it by evolutionary means, but it definitely couldn't confront it. This was proved in the wake of the 1997 Madrid summit: the entire Russian political elite, including some of the most vociferous opponents of NATO expansion, virtually reconciled itself with the first tranche of enlargement<sup>8</sup>.

Assessing the "Russia's factor" in the enlargement story shows that although joining NATO Central and Eastern European countries obtained security guarantees against Russia, they sought the achievement of other goals such as guaranteeing their internal political stability and the acquisition of a new Western identity. Moreover, Russia could not be seen simply as a "defeated actor" in the enlargement game. In the final analysis it appears that the events of those years – NATO Enlargement Study, IFOR (Implementation Force) and SFOR (Stabilization Force) operations in Bosnia, and a long and painful enlargement bargaining with Russia and within the Alliance – can be interpreted as opening towards Russia. In spite of Russia's multiple protests and unenthusiastic consent to enlargement, the whole debate created a unique institutional framework allowing Russia a place and a voice in European affairs. With the cooperation of leading NATO actors, Russia has (or was) turned into a major factor in the enlargement story – indeed, in the European security at large. Paradoxically, with NATO expansion on the cards, Moscow was better off than without it; this was a channel for bringing Russia into the international circuit, and also had a value for Russian domestic debates by permitting the release of some patriotic steam<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Medvedev S., *Rethinking the National Interest: Putin's Turn in Russian Foreign Policy*, Marshall Center Paper, 6., 2004, pp. 40–45.

<sup>9</sup> Medvedev S., "Russia at the End of Modernity", in Medvedev S., Kononov A., Oznobishchev S. (eds.), *Russia and the West at the Millennium. Global Imperatives and Domestic Policies*, LIT-Verlag, Berlin-Hamburg, 2003, p. 43.

### 3. Kosovo: Testing the New World Order

The war in Kosovo was a highly symbolic event, the last European war of the 20th century. It was the first war in history that was said to be fought in pursuit of principle, not interest, and the culmination of a certain post-Cold War geopolitical discourse on the rising new world order. Unlike Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans didn't follow suit of post-communist transition to democracy and engaging into the Transatlantic and European institutions. Ethnic rivalry and bloody conflicts created the stalemate situation, which required external mediation. And it seemed that the West had all prerequisites for successful accomplishment of this mission: enormous military and financial resources, experience of conflict management and democracy promotion, moral superiority based on claiming universality of human rights' principles<sup>10</sup>.

However, in this case Idealpolitik was mixed (or one could say compromised) with all sorts of traditional interests, strategies and mischief. They were numerous and included NATO's search for a post-Cold War role to play, and for a clear enemy; the US's wish to reassert its position in transatlantic relations in the wake of the Amsterdam Treaty and the arrival of the EMU (European Monetary Union); and also the desire of EU Member states to prevent the influx of a million Kosovar refugees. The illusion of an easy victory increased the temptation to start the bombing right before the NATO's fiftieth anniversary in April 1999<sup>11</sup>.

But the desire to strengthen the unity of the West turned out to broaden the gap between the US and Europe. On the one hand, the resolution to start military campaign demonstrated continued US interest in guaranteeing European security and stability and NATO's ability to adapt to the post-Cold War challenges. But on the other hand, as observed by Robert Kagan,

«The conduct of the war reflected the severe transatlantic military imbalance. The US flew the majority of missions, almost all of the precision-guided munitions dropped in Serbia and Kosovo were made in America, and the unmatched superiority of American technical intelligence-gathering capabilities

<sup>10</sup> Medvedev S., "Kosovo, a European Fin-de-siecle", in van Ham P., Medvedev S. (eds.), *Mapping European Security After Kosovo*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

meant that 99 per cent of the proposed targets came from American intelligence sources»<sup>12</sup>.

When, early in the air campaign, it became clear that NATO had failed to deflect Milosevic from his course of ethnic cleansing, NATO began to look for alternative mechanisms of conflict management and/or retrospective justification of its own action. It looked to the players it should have involved from the outset: the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the United Nations, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (the Hague Tribunal), the EU and Russia. And finally it was the Chernomyrdin-Ahtisaari mission, which virtually saved NATO, seemed by late May 1999 hopelessly stuck in the Kosovo quagmire, unable to stop bombing on the one hand, and unwilling to employ ground forces on the other.

At first, Russia's reaction to the start of the NATO air campaign was unanimous indignation. Deep political divisions and partisanship were put aside in the protest against NATO and the show of solidarity with the Serbs. The West had given Russia an eloquent and powerful evidence of her loss in the Cold War. Psychologically, there was a meaningful difference between this situation and Russia's former geopolitical losses. Withdrawal from Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany were seen as a unilateral gesture of goodwill on Russia's part. NATO expansion, for all its alleged strategic damage for Russia, was still negotiated with Moscow, and received Russia's reluctant consent (crowned by the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act). But here, for the first time in the post-Cold War history, something had been accomplished without as little as noticing Russia.

Admitting to the impossibility of opposing the West or halting NATO bombing, Russia took on the rather sensible position of wait-and-see, criticising NATO's action, and gradually resuming cooperation with the West along financial and economic lines. The Kosovo crisis once again sent Russian foreign policy into a damage limitation mode, undermining mutual trust and the fragile mechanisms of cooperation with NATO, and unravelled the political and psychological achievement of the 1997 Paris Declaration and the NATO-Russia Founding Act. From appeasing Russia, the West turned to sidelining Russia – a policy that was consistent with

<sup>12</sup> Kagan R., *Europe Learns the New Rules of Engagement*, «The Sunday Times», 16 February 2003, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/article1179255.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1>.



Russia's dwindling economic and diplomatic power, but sounded hardly encouraging to the country's elite.

However, normalization of relationship followed fast. After initial neglect, the West began looking for ways to involve Russia in crisis management. Semi-isolated, it unexpectedly started winning points on the diplomatic front. The crisis in Kosovo created a common context in which the dialogue with the West resumed. As it was in the case with NATO enlargement, the war in Kosovo gave Russia an interface with the West, providing a forum where she could claim her national interests which otherwise would not even be heard at all. In both cases, Russia might have come out a loser, but these possible losses have risen the level of global awareness about Russia, her problems, and her residual strengths<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4. The Early 2000s: Re-establishing Partnership?

When Vladimir Putin came to power on the last day of the past millennium, on 31 December 1999, the challenges before him were of an equally millennial nature: adapting the Russian state to the changing conditions of globalization, and a strategic review of Russia's foreign and security policy. Rapprochement with the West was seen then as a strategic move, aiming for the rise in Russia's competitiveness on the world stage; it also symbolized a success of the country's post-communist transition. Putin began to launch "trial balloons" and one of them was the idea of Russia's membership in NATO. In February 2000, NATO's Secretary-General, Lord Robertson, was welcomed as a guest in Moscow; then, on March 5, 2000 Vladimir Putin told his BBC interviewer that he did not see why Russia would not join NATO – under certain conditions, of course. NATO's predictable response was that Russian membership was «not on the agenda». In a couple of days, with considerable help from other Russian officials, Mr Putin retreated by explaining his statement to the Russian public as entirely hypothetical<sup>14</sup>.

On the one hand, taking into account the long history of confrontation between NATO and USSR, the painful process of NATO enlargement in the 1990s and Kosovo crisis, the perspective of Russia's joining looked, in fact, virtually impossible. On the other hand, for Russia, which prefers to see NATO as the Western "Concert of Powers" and a club of world rulers, the bid for membership was a matter of prestige. Curiously, in order to

confirm the country's status as one of the centers of "the multipolar world" (Russia's semi-official foreign policy doctrine) it wanted to be accepted into the most powerful Western military organization.

The following rapprochement occurred under circumstances which no one could ever imagine. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it became clear that the West and Russia should jointly resist their common threat, international terrorism. NATO faced the challenge of changing its mode of operation, switching to the fight with global threats, but this transformation could not occur fast. This was one of the reasons for the US's initial unwillingness to use the military structures of NATO in Afghanistan. Ambiguous lessons of the operation Allied Force in Kosovo, and the remoteness of Europe from the battlefield made the Alliance look for strategic partnerships. At the same time Russia's geopolitical position and earlier warfare experience in Afghanistan made Russia a natural partner in implementing the military operation in Afghanistan.

Russia did not raise objections to US troops stationing in Central Asia to wage war in Afghanistan in 2001 and supplied the Northern Alliance with weapons. Moreover, Vladimir Putin took several further symbolic steps. In 2001, Russia withdrew from military bases in Cam Rahn, Vietnam, and Lourdes, Cuba, and took a reserved attitude towards the second wave of NATO enlargement. Even the US withdrawal from the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty in late 2001 was dismissed by Putin as "no threat to Russian security". If during the 1990s Russia, that was in the phase of geopolitical and economic decline, tried to prevent the fixation of this unfavorable status-quo in any kind of treaty, agreement or security system, then at the beginning of the 2000s the necessity to create new institutional framework for cooperation emerged<sup>15</sup>.

And once again, NATO appeared to be one of the key instruments of cooperation with Russia on the global affairs. As soon as November, 2001, Tony Blair proposed to transform the relationship in a way that would more actively engage Russia in the discussions, establishing a new Russia-North Atlantic Council, in which 20 governments would discuss a variety of security issues as equals unlike the earlier consultative Permanent Joint Council<sup>16</sup>. And although his idea seemed too radical, it opened the discussion on the reform, and in May 2002 A New Quality Declaration was signed, which established the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). The structure

<sup>13</sup> Medvedev S., *Rethinking the National...*, cit., p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Gliniski-Vassiliev D., *To Join Or...*, cit.

<sup>15</sup> Medvedev S., "Russia at the End...", cit., p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Utkin A., *Edinstvennaya sverkhderzhava (The Lonely Superpower)*, Algorithm Publishers, Moscow, 2003, p. 449.

and mission of the new body were different from those of the PJC, including meetings at the high military and political levels on the regular basis and cooperation in a broader set of issues.

From today's perspective, the early 2000s seem to be a time of illusions and lost opportunities. Putin's project of "pro-Western authoritarianism" then evolved into "sovereign democracy", and Russia's foreign policy followed the revisionist strategy of questioning, not supporting, Western dominance on the world stage. As for NATO, it missed the opportunity to become a global organization because of the "post-heroic" (to use Edward Luttwak's term) approaches of the Europeans and the US's preference to unilateral actions.

The breakthrough in NATO-Russia relationship also seemed to have a limited impact, failing to solve the problem of different perception of each other. In Russia's Realpolitik view, according to the principles of the "zero-sum game", the 9/11 events were an attack on the West, which gave Russia an opportunity to return to "the great chessboard" as a net exporter of power and security. In this logic, cooperation with NATO not only raised the potential effectiveness of the War on Terror, but also enabled Russia to shift the center of geopolitical struggle from hypothetical battlefields to the bargaining table in Brussels. For Russia's political elite cooperation was a sign of the country's superpower status, but at the same time NATO enlargement, one of the most troublesome aspects of relationship between Russia and the West, continued to be in the agenda, provoking new tensions.

## 5. Mid- and Late 2000s: the Return of Geopolitics

The establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, which was undoubtedly a landmark in the NATO-Russia relationship, however, didn't bring the values or interests of both sides any closer. Starting from 2003, the relationship has been worsening and the gap between two levels of interaction – the political and the technical – has been growing<sup>17</sup>. Politically, the Russian government continues to treat NATO as an adversary and to capitalize on the negative image of NATO ingrained in the society in order to consolidate its power. NATO's liaison and training programs in the post-Soviet space, the prospects of its enlargement to

<sup>17</sup> Lyne R., Talbott S., Watanabe K., *Engaging with Russia: The Next Phase. A Report to the Trilateral Commission*, The Trilateral Commission, Washington-Paris-Tokyo, 2006, pp. 112–115.

Ukraine and Georgia, the US plans to deploy missile defense elements in Poland and the Czech Republic are seen in Russia as essential security threats and as attempts to encircle the country. However, despite these tensions, at a technical and professional level, the cooperation proved to be rather fruitful. Under the NATO-Russia Council's aegis there has been practical cooperation (including joint exercises and simulation) on terrorism, theater missile defense, the handling of nuclear accidents, and sea rescue. Russia assists NATO's military operation in Afghanistan and cooperation in this field hasn't been ruptured even in the wake of the 2008 Russian-Georgian crisis.

This contradiction reflects a general trend in Russia's foreign policy. During the last years, Russia's political elite has pursued a revisionist policy aimed at replaying the end of the Cold War and opposed the West politically, while at the same time aligning with it institutionally – expressing an idea of Russia's membership in NATO, organizing the G8 summit in St. Petersburg in 2006, and negotiating to join the WTO (World Trade Organization). Vladimir Putin consolidated his power within the country and became more self-confident on the world stage. An ideological basis for these policies was provided by the concept of "sovereign democracy", which de facto meant Russia's right to be the West's privileged partner without hearing any criticism of its domestic state of affairs.

The NATO and EU enlargement to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the three Baltic states, in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s have been met with resentment in Russia, but the country had virtually no resources to resist it, or any rational arguments against it. The membership of these countries in the Western institutions was a logical end of their post-communist transformation. But the case is not so simple with the countries of the Former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltic states), which became potential applicants to the European integration project in the 2000s. The "Color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine were seen in Russia as a geopolitical defeat and stimulated the reassessment of the country's foreign policy. Delaying or derailing these countries' drive to the West, especially their membership in NATO, became one of Russia's top foreign policy priorities. Vladimir Putin was present in person at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, and although Ukraine and Georgia were not granted the Membership Action Plan, the final communiqué of the summit stated that membership of these two countries was not a question of whether but when. In the light of these words Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili became more willing to resolve the problem of "unrecognized

states" within his country and Russia became firmer in its desire to prevent NATO enlargement further East. Finally, this culminated in the Russian-Georgian military conflict in August 2008.

The situation with Ukraine and Georgia shows that the entire NATO enlargement paradigm has probably reached its limits. There are virtually no military reasons for this round of NATO expansion, which is more likely to provoke conflict than to prevent them. Ukraine is too big to be absorbed by the West in a few years. Georgia is situated too far from the North Atlantic area, sitting in the middle of the highly explosive Caucasus. Both of them cannot contribute a lot to NATO's military might, but the very possibility of their NATO membership has already become a factor of their internal political struggles and has perplexed their, and NATO's, relations with Russia.

According to the Russian viewpoint, Ukraine's and Georgia's prospective membership will raise questions not only of European security but also of European identity. If these countries are accepted, then why keep Russia out? This dilemma may paralyze the bureaucratic thinking and the logic of NATO's evolution. A way out of this deadlock calls for new political approaches. The West should choose a more flexible and coherent policy with respect to Ukraine and Georgia, and Russia must finally formulate a positive foreign policy agenda, reaching beyond her traditional negativist approach: saying *nyet* to any critique of Russia's authoritarian regime, and *nyet* to NATO enlargement in Russia's "near abroad", while admitting that cooperation with the West is the only way to address the global challenges and to modernize the country.

Summing up, relations between NATO and Russia in the 2000s were ambiguous and controversial. On the one hand, the parties could create institutional arrangements for cooperation, and in the face of their common threat, they became more pragmatic in their approaches than it was during the 1990s. On the other hand, in the light of the growing global instability and erosion of the post-Cold War world order, they preferred to limit the scope of their cooperation, conditioning it by the transformation processes within NATO or Russia. For NATO, the question of partnership with Russia was the question of Russia's transit to democracy and acceptance of the Alliance's expansion eastwards. Russia, in turn, was opposed to NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia, criticizing the organization for not being able to diminish the US influence in it and to transform itself from a Western military alliance into a global security organization – or at least into one that would include Russia.

In fact, as bluntly stated by Sergei Karaganov, during the last decade NATO has evolved from a defensive union to an offensive one. It waged wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan and its leading nation with the support of some of NATO members invaded Iraq<sup>18</sup>. That's why, taking into the account the fact that the political elites of the countries which joined NATO in this period, are strongly anti-Russian, Moscow keeps its cautious position and resists the emergence of new dividing lines in its "near abroad".

In a sense, the decade has made a full circle. One cannot fail to observe the symbolic resemblance of the years 1999 and 2008. NATO's war in Kosovo in March-June 1999 was replicated by Russia's "humanitarian" war in South Ossetia in August 2008, and Kosovo independence was retaliated by a similar South Ossetian declaration. NATO enlargement, the first round of which took place in March 1999, was back on the agenda in 2008 when NATO discussed granting the Membership Action Plan to Ukraine and Georgia. Similarly to 1999, new presidents came to power in Russia and in the US. And just as NATO and Russia managed to get over the Kosovo crisis in 1999, both parties are restoring dialogue after the Russian-Georgian war. Having experienced the systemic crisis of relationship, the parties are searching for the reset buttons.

## 6. Overview of the Institutional Forms of Cooperation

Curiously, the history of NATO-Russia institutions is as old as the Russian Federation itself: the first meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and the last meeting of Soviet leaders, on which they declared the USSR dissolved, occurred simultaneously. And as the final communiqué of the NACC's meeting was being agreed, the Soviet ambassador announced that the Soviet Union hadn't existed any more and he now only represented the Russian Federation<sup>19</sup>.

The NACC was the first organization within the NATO framework aimed at developing the dialogue between the countries, which were for a long time divided by the Iron Curtain. It emerged on the initiative of the US and included the countries of NATO, Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union republics, thus virtually coinciding with the composition of the CSCE. The decisions of the NACC were adopted on the

<sup>18</sup> Karaganov S., *Nuzhna li nam NATO? (Do we need NATO?)*, Russia in Global Affairs, December 2008, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/0/10816.html>.

<sup>19</sup> *NATO's Cooperation with Partners*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 9 May 2007, [http://www.nato.int/issues/partnership\\_evolution/index.html](http://www.nato.int/issues/partnership_evolution/index.html).



multilateral basis, which gave an opportunity of building a new post-Cold War area of security "from Vancouver to Vladivostok." And although this prospect proved to be too idealistic to be realized right after the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, the consultations within NACC played a positive role during the work on the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security in 1992<sup>20</sup>. In 1997 the organization was replaced by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which currently brings together fifty NATO and Partner countries.

However, the institutional arrangement of NACC did not let NATO pursue more flexible policies with regard to the former Soviet bloc countries. As a means to differentiate its approaches, NATO launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in January 1994. The conditions of its adoption were different from the ones of the NACC. In the light of the debate about the possibility of NATO enlargement, this program could meet the divergent interests of both Russia and Central and Eastern European countries. Russia was misled, viewing this program as an alternative to the former Soviet bloc's countries membership in the Alliance and thus welcoming their participation. These countries themselves, in turn, were satisfied, being granted an opportunity to cooperate closely with NATO. They joined the PfP immediately after the launch of the program, while Russia signed the PfP Framework Document several months later and worked out an individual plan of participation only in 1995, when the program has already fulfilled its initial mission of filtration of the prospective candidates for joining the Alliance.

When in 1996-97 NATO enlargement became inevitable, Russia wasn't completely left out. Bargaining over the enlargement process led to signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and Russia in May 1997 and to the subsequent creation of the NATO-Russia PJC, a consultative organization, which central objective was «[...] to build increasing levels of trust, unity of purpose and habits of consultation and cooperation between NATO and Russia, in order to enhance each other's security and that of all nations in the Euro-Atlantic area and diminish the security of none»<sup>21</sup>.

But in reality, beyond this rhetoric, the parties tried to avoid anchoring their relations institutionally. The Founding Act was signed as an intergovernmental agreement, which did not require ratification, thus

permitting Boris Yeltsin to escape clashes with the State Duma over the document and also guaranteeing the West that Russia would not have any influence on NATO affairs. Moreover, Russia was implicitly in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis NATO due to the fact that it dealt with a consolidated stance of the organization presented as a given fact rather than a matter of dialogue. As a result, the PJC had more symbolic than practical value. That is why during the Kosovo crisis Russia and NATO froze their contacts without even trying to find a consensus.

But few years later, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and Russia's support and assistance to the US war on terror, the ineffectiveness of the mechanisms of cooperation turned out to be a serious liability. The PJC was bound to be reformed in a way that would reflect the growing role of Russia in addressing global challenges. The new structure, the NATO-Russia Council, was created under the New Quality Declaration signed by the heads of state and government of NATO member states and the Russian Federation in May 2002. Operating on the principle of consensus, which should be reached by NATO member states and Russia, the NRC covered a broader set of issues and enhanced the military transparency.

The NRC has grown into a complex bureaucratic body, which includes around twenty committees and working groups addressing such problems as international terrorism, nonproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), control of conventional arms, drug trafficking, theater missile defense, airspace management, military-to-military cooperation, submarine crew search, crisis management, civil emergencies etc. In 2004 the NATO-Russia Action Plan on Terrorism was adopted; since 2006 Russia participates in Operation Active Endeavour (OAE), NATO's counterterrorism operation in the Mediterranean Sea; the Cooperative Airspace Initiative, which is being developed under the auspices of the NATO-Russia Council, fosters NATO-Russia cooperation on airspace surveillance and air traffic coordination. In 2005 the experience of joint Russia-NATO maneuvers helped to save the Russian bathyscaphe AS-28 in distress. In 2006 the NRC launched the Pilot Project for Counter-Narcotics Training of Afghan and Central Asian Personnel. All these examples show that despite growing political tensions, NATO-Russia cooperation is essential for providing stability on the huge territory from Vancouver to Vladivostok and from Murmansk to Kabul. And whatever the politicians from both sides declare, at a time when the concept of security includes such aspects as humanitarian assistance, energy dialogue, not to speak of the counterterrorism measures and nonproliferation of WMD, the price of the refusal to cooperate may be dangerously high.

<sup>20</sup> Gliniski-Vassiliev D., "Rasshirenye NATO na...", cit., p. 112-113.

<sup>21</sup> *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*, Paris, 27 May 1997, <http://www.nato-russiacouncil.info/htm/EN/documents27may97.shtml>.



Summing up Russia-NATO institutional cooperation, one cannot fail to observe an institutionalization of the Russian foreign and security policy thinking, which was largely due to interaction with NATO. Even when external integration and institutions were perceived to be against Russia's interest, Russia maintained an institutional dialogue under the most adverse circumstances, as was the case with NATO. On the one hand, the two waves of NATO enlargement and the war in Kosovo have largely alienated Russian public opinion from the West. But on the other hand, these contentious issues have created a unique NATO-Russia institutional framework, which, paradoxically, became one of Russia's key interfaces with the West. Despite multiple differences, Russia was engaged in North NACC and PfP; in the IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia, and in Kosovo Force (KFOR); in the Permanent Joint Council and currently in the NATO-Russia Council.

Through the 1990s, there was a continuous NATO-Russia institutional buildup; in fact, much of Russia's relations with the West were conceived within, and channeled into, multilateral structures. The NATO-Russia interaction illustrated a paradigm shift in Russian security thinking: while in the old (modern) pattern, Russia deplored her alleged strategic losses, in the new institutional pattern she experienced the policy of multilateral partnership, even without the prospect of membership<sup>22</sup>.

## Conclusions

During the last twenty years, NATO has experienced a tremendous transformation. Firstly, in 1991 NATO lost its main adversary and, consequently, its mission. Secondly, in the 1990s NATO had to adapt to the new conditions, substituting its lost strategic mission for a new one, namely integration of the former Soviet bloc countries into the Western institutions. Thirdly, in the 2000s NATO was faced with a challenge of transformation from a regional military alliance into a global security organization, which must deal with a much broader set of issues. Fourthly, during these years NATO has several times waged wars but bearing in mind the military might of the organization, it failed to win persuasively. Finally, NATO is likely reaching the territorial limits of its enlargement, which raises questions on its future.

Over these 20 years Russia was far from being an easy partner for NATO. Nervous, hesitant and disappointed in the 1990s, it became self-confident, arrogant and ambitious in the 2000s. There has not been any single trend in NATO-Russia relationship, which looked like a roller coaster ride (originally called the Russian Mountains), oscillating between the promise of partnership and the rhetoric of Cold War. An important thing, though, is that they constantly fluctuated around the axis of Russia-West mutual dependence and importance for each other – political, economic, and cultural. During all these years NATO has successfully played a role of an interface between Russia and the West, trying to keep Russia involved and engaging it in the political dialogue. For Russia, which knows perfectly well the language of power and Realpolitik, security relations with a practical, down-to-earth organization, confined by specific challenges and missions, has always been an understandable task, especially in contrast with the diplomatic and rhetorical games of the “postmodern” EU.

In the forthcoming years the future of relationship will largely depend on NATO's transformation. Russia seems to be willing to cooperate in Afghanistan and other areas of mutual interest but, currently it has only one clearly articulated goal with respect to NATO, namely the abandoning of its plans of enlargement into Ukraine and Georgia. In any case, the political interface provided by NATO will continue to be important for the country's political elite (even if it doesn't accept this fact officially): as the 2008 Russian-Georgian war has shown, Russia has no friends or satellites even in its “near abroad”, and that is why it has to value the existing bridges with the West. And NATO, for all its pitfalls in relations with Russia and mutual idiosyncrasies, provides an indispensable institutional framework.

<sup>22</sup> Medvedev S., *Rethinking the National...*, cit., pp. 39-40.