5 september 2009   
[http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\_13589](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/print/number/n_13589)

**Rethinking Security in “Greater Europe”**

[Fyodor Lukyanov](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/person/Fyodor_Lukyanov)

[© "Russia in Global Affairs". № 3, July - September 2009](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/28/)

Fyodor Lukyanov is Editor-in-Chief of Russia in Global Affairs. This article is based on the report made by the author at the international symposium “What Does Russia Think?” held jointly by the Russian Institute and the Center of Liberal Strategies (Sofia, Bulgaria) in Moscow, June-July 2009.

Resume The proposal to build a new European security architecture, which Russian President Dmitry Medvedev put forward in Berlin in June 2008 and which he followed up in November in Evian, was Moscow’s first attempt in 20 years to formulate a coherent foreign-policy vision.

The proposal to build a new European security architecture, which Russian President Dmitry Medvedev put forward in Berlin in June 2008 and which he followed up in November in Evian, was Moscow’s first attempt in 20 years to formulate a coherent foreign-policy vision.

In this sense, Mikhail Gorbachev could be described as a precursor of Medvedev. Gorbachev’s “new political thinking,” most vividly expressed in his speech at a UN General Assembly session in December 1988, was a comprehensive world development concept, based on the rejection of a Marxist class approach and on the recognition of global challenges. From the point of view of the Soviet leadership, this concept created an ideological and political basis for making the end of the Cold War into a “joint venture” of the two superpowers. This would have helped to avoid a win-lose situation, which is always fraught with psychological complications.

The breakup of the Soviet system, which was caused by internal reasons, prevented Gorbachev’s plans from materializing. However, subsequent developments showed that the use of the win-lose logic in ideological confrontation, which prevailed after 1991, had a fairly negative impact on the policies of both the “winners” and the “losers.”

Since then, the Kremlin has made no effort to produce a foreign-policy conceptual document. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a viewpoint prevailed in Russia for some time that it did not need to rethink global and regional realities independently, as this country was joining the community of prospering democracies and, therefore, would share their visions. This na?ve view changed very soon, but Russia’s foreign policy became plainly reactive. Russia simply responded to external challenges, with more or less success.

Of course, the idea of a European Security Treaty is less ambitious than what Gorbachev proposed. But from the perspective of maintaining global stability, the formation of a stable system of relations in the Northern Hemisphere (which is the goal of the idea’s authors) is of crucial importance. Although the economic and political role of the world’s South and East is growing, the course of global developments still depends on the West at large (Russia included).

GOOD REASONS

Medvedev’s initiative reveals a desire to refute the widespread view that Russia’s foreign policy of the transition years is like a swaying pendulum. In an interview with Reuters, which the Russian president gave also in June last year, he spoke about the foreign policy line which the Russian Federation “has painstakingly developed over these last two decades. Adjustments might be made here and there, but the essence of our foreign policy remains unchanged.” In other words, circumstances and conditions may change, but Russia’s basic views of the world order remain intact.

It was not accidental that in his Berlin speech Dmitry Medvedev referred to previous eras. His words about “the integrity of the entire Euro-Atlantic space – from Vancouver to Vladivostok” reanimated the ideas of Mikhail Gorbachev’s times, while his proposal to “draft and sign a legally binding treaty on European security” – a kind of a “new edition of the Helsinki Final Act” – was a transformation of proposals of the 1990s. In those years, in a bid to prevent NATO’s enlargement, Russian diplomacy pressed for giving more powers to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Moreover, the president directly referred to that initiative: “An organization such as the OSCE could, it would seem, embody European civilization’s newfound unity, but it is prevented from doing so, prevented from becoming a full-fledged general regional organization.”

Of course, there were also practical reasons for the emergence of the idea of a European Security Treaty after the new president came to power. Vladimir Putin’s presidency ended at a very low level of trust and mutual understanding between Russia and key Western powers. For various reasons – both objective and subjective – the former formats had exhausted their potential. The system of interaction institutions, which shaped in the 1990s, did not develop but, on the contrary, degraded.

The lack of a common conceptual basis and of a shared system of views prevented the implementation of cooperation projects, some of which were of a breakthrough nature. For example, the almost revolutionary idea of Putin about the integration of Russia and the European Union through the exchange of strategic, above all energy, assets produced the opposite result – strong alienation instead of rapprochement. Profound economic interaction in “Greater Europe” proved impossible in the absence of a system of military-political security that would embrace all the parties and that would enjoy their trust.

This is why there emerged a need for an updated “track” for dialogue, which would mark a new chapter in Russia’s approach but which, at the same time, would preserve the continuity of the previous policy.

The idea of a European Security Treaty is interesting, above all, as the quintessence of the foreign-policy experience accumulated by Moscow over the 20 years of sweeping changes in Europe and the rest of the world.

After the collapse of the Communist system, the issue of building a “Europe without dividing lines” was put on the international agenda. Until the mid-1990s, the answer to the question of how this could be achieved remained open. The scale of the geopolitical shift on a vast space that embraced the whole of Europe and much of Eurasia proved too large. However, in 1994-1996, the leading Euro-Atlantic states formulated their own views on the nature of future changes. They began to expand institutions of the Western political system, above all NATO and the European Union, and to gradually extend the scope of their responsibility to adjacent territories.

The issue of limits for the expansion was not raised then; yet there was an inner understanding of where Europe ends. Lord Ralf Dahrendorf in his book Reflections on the Revolution in Europe (1990) gave a very clear definition of that: “Europe is not just a geographical or even cultural concept, but one of acute political significance. This arises at least in part from the fact that small and medium-sized countries try to determine their destiny together. A superpower has no place in their midst, even if it is not an economic and perhaps no longer a political giant. The capacity to kill the whole of mankind several times over puts the Soviet Union in different company from Germany and Italy, Poland and Czechoslovakia, and even the nuclear powers Britain and France.”

“If there is a common European house or home to aim for, it is therefore not Gorbachev’s but one to the West of his and his successors’ crumbling empire. […] Europe ends at the Soviet border, wherever that may be,” Dahrendorf pointed out.

The Soviet border disappeared a year-plus after the publication of this book, but the qualities which Dahrendorf thought stood in the way of the Soviet Union’s integration into Europe have been inherited by the Russian Federation.  Admittedly, the depth of the changes that took place in Russia came as a surprise to many; most importantly, during the first few years after the Soviet Union’s breakup, Russia quite unexpectedly and consistently expressed, in quite plain terms, its desire to become part of united Europe. Nevertheless, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which Russia and the European Union signed in June 1994, marked the choice of a different model – namely, a course not towards EU membership for Russia (even as a long-term goal) but towards coexistence based on rules and norms established by the European Union.

Russia’s relations with NATO were built according to a similar model, although, for understandable reasons, they have always been more emotionally colored. Moscow opposed the expansion of the alliance even in those years when Russian foreign policy was largely pro-Western. The signing of the Russia-NATO Founding Act in 1997 was viewed as a compromise: a new quality of ties between Russia and the alliance in exchange for its expansion to the East. NATO’s war against Yugoslavia in the winter and spring of 1999 made Russia change its view of the alliance, but not in the way this had been planned. Moscow began to view NATO as a real source of threat, which predetermined the further evolution of relations between the parties.

As a result, by the mid-2000s, after the large-scale enlargement of NATO and the EU, there emerged prerequisites for a new division of Europe along the same line that Lord Dahrendorf wrote about. However, the line was not fixed due to the emergence of a new Zwischeneuropa between the Russian Federation and the European Union/NATO. These countries, of which Ukraine is the main and strategically the most important one, have become objects of keen geopolitical competition. This competition is driven by a combination of several factors.

**First**, Russia has never found a niche for itself in the new European system after the end of the Cold War. Therefore, the preservation of prerequisites for the creation of a system of its own acquires major significance for Russia.

**Second**, NATO has been experiencing an identity crisis after the end of the ideological confrontation, and its attempts to go beyond its Euro-Atlantic area of responsibility will most likely fail. Therefore, the alliance is persistently seeking to consolidate its role as a universal European security system, which provides for its maximum enlargement. Without that, NATO’s meaning and purpose would be unclear.

And **third**, the European Union has never become a strong and unified actor on the world stage, and its economic and demographic might and soft power potential are in stark contrast to its geopolitical influence. Problems with the formation of a pan-European political identity are the main obstacle. This has become obvious against the backdrop of an ever-increasing number of external challenges, to which the EU has to find responses. The EU foreign policy is still reduced to its traditional model – that is, gradual extension of the EU legal and legislative frameworks to adjacent territories, and the creation of a “predictability belt” along the EU borders. As neighboring countries adapt to the European model, the EU’s further enlargement would be a logical follow-up.

However, the EU will need a long time yet to “digest” the previous enlargements. In addition, both the EU and NATO have exhausted their potential for “light” expansion. Both organizations have entered an area of open rivalry, where they will inevitably meet with opposition from Russia.

All these factors are creating a zone of imbalance and tension in Europe. The situation is aggravated by the fact that not a single country in the former Soviet Union, including Russia, can say for certain that its borders are historically justified, natural and, therefore, inviolable. In the early 1990s, everyone was relieved to see a relatively peaceful and quiet disintegration of the Soviet Union. Yet it is too early to think that challenges brought about by the breakup of the giant empire, which had for centuries structured a vast space in Western and Central Eurasia, have been overcome.

In addition to the weakness of many of the states that have emerged in place of the former Soviet Union (and not all of them can be described as finally viable), there is a problem of divided nations, of which Russians are the largest one.

On the one hand, this factor impedes nation-building in states with large Russian diasporas.

On the other hand, it stimulates pro-unification sentiments in Russia and, consequently, tempts Moscow to use irredentism in its foreign policy.

The Russian leadership has largely been refraining from taking an irredentist approach and is aware of the dangers it poses. However, the country and society are going through a period of painful formation of a new national identity, in which nationalistic factors inevitably play a role. In these conditions, the Russian leaders themselves would be interested in backing their non-revanchist policy with a major international agreement that would help to channel the public mood into a less destructive course.

I would agree with those who say that the idea of a European Security Treaty, especially the way it was presented at the World Policy Forum in Evian, is actually a repetition of the ideas contained in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. This cannot be described as a forte of this proposal. Anyone familiar with the basics of diplomacy knows that an attempt to re-establish principles that were already adopted some time in the past does not strengthen but weakens them. Yet the Kremlin’s logic is understandable.

The last decade was marked by a deepening conflict between international rules, which no one seems to have called in question yet, and the principles that countries were guided by in their practices. After the end of the Cold War, institutions – organizations and legal norms – almost did not change. Yet, even though formally still in force, they became deformed. Many fundamental notions, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity or criteria for the use of force, were eroded.

There emerged new concepts (for example, humanitarian intervention or the “responsibility to protect”) which served as political instruments but which were not provided for by classical international law. The party that took the initiative after the Cold War began to revise the practice of international relations, but the majority of countries in the world opposed such an approach. Therefore, a formal change of the rules of the game was impossible, and the gap between the letter and the spirit grew.

This gap between legal norms and real politics has produced a situation where principles have to be legitimized anew. The Old World has changed beyond recognition over the last few decades. And all the three baskets that served as the foundation for the Helsinki Accords – the military-political, economic and humanitarian baskets – now need to be filled with new content – especially as the present set of challenges faced by Europe is very much the same that it faced in those years.

**First**, the matter at issue is military-political balance and confidence in the field of security. Russia’s attempt in 2007 to discuss the issue of the CFE Treaty within the frameworks of the OSCE failed: its partners did not want to do that, because the organization in fact has long lost this aspect of its activities.

Another pressing problem, mentioned above, is borders. Since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, which reiterated their inviolability, the European map has been repeatedly redrawn.

**Second**, the economy of Greater Europe also needs to be rethought. The experience of recent years has demonstrated that the European political and economic climate is a complex phenomenon, and it is impossible to separate economic cooperation (especially in the energy field) from the situation in the security field. The economy is being politicized by all the parties, which reflects the general low level of trust in the world. The economic crisis has only exacerbated all inner problems that have piled up in Greater Europe.

And finally third, there are things to discuss with regard to the humanitarian basket, as well. The protection of democracy and human rights is an outstanding achievement of the pan-European process. And it would be only good if many of the parties to the OSCE, including Russia, reiterated their adherence to these principles. But the democratic idea should be protected not only against authoritarian encroachments but also against attempts to make it instrumental in the name of geopolitical purposes. And this is exactly what happened in the process of the “democracy promotion.”

GOOD CHANCES?

What are the chances that the idea of a European Security Treaty will materialize?

Since Dmitry Medvedev came out with this idea, two major crises have taken place in Europe – the war in the Caucasus in August and the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine in January. These developments served as one more proof of the dysfunction of existing institutions in both the military-political field and in the sphere of energy security. For example, the OSCE simply fell out of the context of the Georgian war, while Ukraine’s membership in the Energy Charter Treaty did not help to solve the problem of gas transit to Europe.

These events have had a dual effect on discussions about a European Security Treaty.

On the one hand, as the awareness of the problems has increased, interest in Russia’s proposals has grown as well, and Moscow has begun to make efforts (albeit obviously insufficient yet) in order to fill them with concrete content.

On the other hand, the general atmosphere of the discussion is not conducive to achieving the desired results. The quantity of mutual complaints that piled up over the last few years has transformed into quality. As a result, there is a kind of “presumption of guilt” in Russian-Western relations now – each party has a negative view of whatever the other party does. As the United States and the European Union see no need to revise the rules of the game in the security sphere, it is necessary to expand the space of dialogue, so as to shift the focus from the revision of the present system to a search for responses to new challenges. This approach can be facilitated by the change of administration in the United States, which has already resulted in a marked change in Washington’s priorities.

There are spheres where Russia can certainly ensure an “added value” in the security field. Serious threats are piling up and becoming increasingly dangerous in Central Eurasia, and it is not accidental that the U.S. administration is shifting its attention more and more to that region. Unlike Europe, where the issue of a collective security system and ways to settle regional conflicts has always been on the agenda (albeit with mixed success), there has been no such approach in South, East or Central Asia. The danger of crises in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran has gone far beyond regional frameworks, and averting this danger requires institutional interaction among great powers – especially as the security of Europe and Eurasia is closely intertwined for many reasons. These include energy problems, drug trafficking, the growth of fundamentalist sentiments and, in the longer term, possible border conflicts over resources (for example, water wars in Central Asia).

In this context, Russia’s Foreign Ministry has proposed holding in 2010 an official meeting of the heads of five international organizations (the OSCE, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, NATO, the EU and the Commonwealth of Independent States) that operate in the Euro-Atlantic region. The organizations would “discuss their security strategies and work out coordinated approaches with the aim of forming an indivisible security space in the region.” It is not quite clear why the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was not mentioned in this context. It seems that this organization, which includes China, has particularly good chances to become the most influential force. In addition, the SCO offers the only chance to cause Beijing, which avoids any commitments, to assume its share of responsibility for stability in the region.

Russia’s desire to transform the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization into viable regional structures should be viewed not through the prism of rivalry with NATO and the United States but as a contribution to the creation of an effective toolkit on the vast space “from Vancouver to Vladivostok” which Dmitry Medvedev mentioned in his Berlin speech. Actually, Russia proposes not revising the results of the Cold War but rethinking the notion of “European security” in order to bring it into line with the realities of the 21st century.

*Последнее обновление 5 september 2009, 15:25*