

**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES**  
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**Russia's national  
security strategy  
and military doctrine  
and their implications  
for the EU**

**SEDE**

## IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

# Russia's national security strategy and military doctrine and their implications for the EU

### ABSTRACT

The European Union sees its relationship with Russia as a 'key strategic challenge'. Its members are alarmed by Russia's violations of international commitments and increased military activity in Europe. Russian recently updated basic strategic documents are full of indications about Moscow's world vision and security concerns. They indirectly point to a tension between Russia's internal (economic, demographic, societal) weaknesses and its claim to be recognized as one of the 'centers of influence' in the emerging multipolar world order. The West, including the EU, is clearly perceived as the major challenger to both Russia's great power ambition and security. At the same time, various indicators suggest that Moscow is probably not fully confident that it will obtain a gratifying role in the emerging new international landscape. All this has led Russia to rely massively on its restored military capabilities, while pursuing a very active diplomacy, in which the relative importance of the EU has declined in recent years. The EU nonetheless has an important role to play in promoting the second engine of the 'double-track Russia strategy' that the West (the EU, NATO, the United States) has been pursuing — strengthening defenses on the one hand, pursuing dialogue and cooperative engagement on the other hand.

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## Introduction

'Managing the relationship with Russia represents a key strategic challenge', the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy says. The European Union (EU) 'will not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea nor accept the destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine'. Russia has 'challenged the European security order at its core'<sup>1</sup>. Such is the difficult background of the EU's effort to rebuild relations with Moscow in a profoundly modified geopolitical landscape. The conflict in Ukraine, which initially was an indirect product of the tensions between the two players' policies in their shared neighbourhood<sup>2</sup>, has left deep scars.

The complexity of the new strategic situation on the European continent makes it all the more important to understand Russian security perceptions, international motives and goals, as well as their sources. The idea is widespread in Europe that the cause of Russia's recent assertive international behaviour is to be found in the need for Vladimir Putin to restore the legitimacy of the regime after the demonstrations that took place in Russia following the 2011 elections and to hide the government's inability to reform the country's economy and institutions. While this is certainly a factor that should be taken into account, it eclipses the fact that Moscow's criticism of the Western-led international order has been a very stable element in Russian foreign policy line since the mid-1990s.

Many international relations scholars (Robert Frank, Alfred Grosser, Robert Jervis) have emphasized the worth of being aware of 'the other's' — the partner's, the adversary's — mental frame and perceptions, which seems even more important in tense or conflictual contexts. Russia has provided its international partners and challengers with plenty of relevant clues and indications about its state of mind and assessment of the international situation by updating several of the strategic documents that frame its security, defense and foreign policies. While Russian political scientists often state that the practical importance of these documents should not be exaggerated, they nonetheless offer a valuable synthesis of Russia's world vision — perhaps in a more sober style than many speeches of Russian officials in recent months.

Two background elements are of peculiar importance for the European Union to take into account while tackling the 'Russian strategic challenge'. One is the adversarial vision of 'the West' (*Zapad*), which includes the EU. This trend has only grown stronger since in 2007, at the Munich security conference, President Putin articulated the basic tenets of the foreign policy vision that has since then driven Moscow's behaviour on the world stage. In substance, he vehemently criticized the United States' and its allies' international conduct, blamed them for creating hotbeds of international instability and for illegitimate use of force. He also suggested that the West should be prepared to share international power and leadership with rising economic powers<sup>3</sup>. Since then, every time Russia has resorted to military force – in Georgia (2008), in Ukraine (2014), in Syria (2015) –, it did so with motivations and goals that were more or less directly related to its hectic relations with 'the West'. All the recently updated strategic documents expose these same ideas. The second element that will impact the EU's relations with Moscow is indeed the prevalence of hard

<sup>1</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, June 2016, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> The revolution in Ukraine was not called 'Euromaidan' out of the blue. The movement originated in the demonstrations that developed in Kiyv after President Yanukovich decided, in late November 2013, to suspend the signing of an association agreement with the European Union at the Eastern partnership summit that was to take place in Vilnius. This decision occurred after Russia, in the preceding months, put a lot of pressure on the Ukrainian government, mixing threats and incentives. This reflected a wider and profound divergence of perspectives between Russia and the EU on the future of the 'shared neighbourhood', as will be described further in this report. This should be taken into account in all analyses of the Ukraine conflict, even though the demonstrators later on focused on an agenda wider than the issue of the European integration of the country (anti-corruption, governance reforms, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007, Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>].

power instruments. Officially, Russia's security policy is multidimensional. Its Security strategy integrates various parameters including political and societal stability, as well as economic, health, demographic, environmental, military dimensions. However, in recent years, Moscow's foreign and security policy has tended to rely massively on military and hard power tools. In an unconventional manner if one considers the hierarchy of Russian strategic documents, the updated military doctrine was adopted before the new version of the Security strategy, and one quarter of the Security strategy is devoted to defense issues and international considerations.

What are the implications for the European Union, which seems to be occupying a less prominent role than it used to in Moscow's foreign policy agenda and which is not in the best position to address the Russian challenge in its military dimension? This study aims to contribute to the necessary discussion on such a strategic issue by providing an assessment of Russia's post-2014 security and military policy as well as an analysis of its connections with and impact on the Russia-EU relationship and mutual perceptions. Finally it explores the residual potential for security cooperation.

# 1 Russia's new security and military policy after 2014

As viewed from Russia, the events in Ukraine and the subsequent crisis in Moscow's relations with the West made it necessary to urgently update basic documents that are meant to shape the national security strategy.

A new military doctrine was adopted on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014<sup>4</sup>. Roughly one year later President Putin signed the new Security strategy — 'the basic document for strategic planning, defining national interests and national strategic priorities of the Russian Federation, as well as the goals and measures, both domestically and in foreign policy, that are meant to strengthen national security ... and to ensure the sustainable development of the country in a long term perspective'<sup>5</sup>. Finally, on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, a new Foreign policy concept was adopted<sup>6</sup>. The previous versions of these documents had, indeed, a rather short life — they were adopted respectively in February 2010 (previous version: April 2000), May 2009 (previous version: January 2000) and February 2013 (previous version: July 2008). This points to Russia's perception that its security environment has been radically transformed.

## 1.1 New strategic documents for a radically transformed security context

The updated documents underline several key elements that are quite traditional of Russia's world vision:

- They emphasize the country's status as one of the leading world powers whose sovereignty must be respected and whose foreign policy is independent. The idea that Russia should be recognized as a great power is a key parameter that has driven Moscow's posture on the world stage for several centuries. Moscow has constantly claimed a role in all major international strategic issues and has never accepted a limitation of its authority to regional matters. This is due to a number of factors including Russia's Orthodox identity, position between Europe and Asia and the immensity of its territory<sup>7</sup>. This positioning also reflects the nostalgia of the Cold war era, when Moscow stood as one of the two superpowers. This nostalgia is illustrated, among other things, by Russian officials' frequent references to the 'special responsibility' that their country, as one of the major nuclear powers, shares with the United States in world security affairs. Russia, the new Security strategy says, has become a great power again. Determined to 'increase its role in the emerging polycentric world', it is increasingly involved in the resolution of major international problems and military conflicts, in ensuring strategic stability (Security strategy)... Russia has become a 'centre of influence in today's world' (Foreign policy concept).
- The strategic documents emphasize the Russian leaders' vision that the international scene is dangerous, volatile, chaotic, and marked by stiff competition for resources (including, supposedly, Russia's), control of markets and transport routes, and political influence amongst major powers. A new polycentric world is emerging but it is characterized by rising regional and global instability. For centuries, Russian strategic thinking has been dominated by the idea that the country faces threats and challenges in all strategic directions. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this enduring perception has been fueled by

<sup>4</sup> Full text available in Russian on the Russian Security Council's website (<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/18/129.html>).

<sup>5</sup> Adopted on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Full text available in Russian on the Russian Security Council's website (<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/1/133.html>).

<sup>6</sup> Full text available in Russian and in several foreign languages on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6B6Z29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6B6Z29/content/id/2542248)).

<sup>7</sup> On all these issues, see Isabelle Facon, 'Russian Strategic Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Redefining the West-East Balance', in Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, Michael Wills (ed.), *Strategic Asia 2016-17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific*, National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016, pp. 62–89; Elena Morenkova Perrier, *The Key Principles of Russian Strategic Thinking*, Laboratoire de l'IRSEM, Paris, 2014.

the fact that, as the Russians see it, a new front of vulnerability is opening in the Arctic — the only region that both the Security strategy and military doctrine mention nominally<sup>8</sup>. This acute threat perception seems to be shared by the Russian population: according to a January 2016 Levada opinion poll, 65 % of the people surveyed believed that other countries represent a military threat to Russia (vs 40 % in 2006)<sup>9</sup>.

- Maintaining Russia's pre-eminence and influence in the post-Soviet space remains a key foreign policy priority. In strategic terms, this reflects Russia's entrenched inclination to surround itself with buffer zones as a protection from invasions and external instabilities. This means, as the Russians see it, that Russia should be able to control either militarily or politically neighboring spaces and countries. In a more contemporary approach, such a control has been viewed as the key to Russia asserting itself as one of the 'centres of influence' in the budding polycentric world. Integration processes with countries in the former Soviet Union (Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization) are important vectors for achieving this goal. Relations with these countries continue to occupy the first place in the list of 'regional foreign policy priorities of the Russian Federation' presented in the updated Foreign policy concept, which underlines that Moscow pays 'special attention to organizations and structures that reinforce Eurasian integration processes'.

Newer elements appear in the updated documents:

- Russia's getting stronger has come with a price: it faces strong opposition by other powers, which reject the independence of its foreign policy course ('Russia's conducting an independent foreign and domestic policy is met with resistance on the part of the United States and its allies, which try to maintain their domination in world affairs', the Security strategy says; as a result, these countries have been trying to 'contain' (*sderzhivanye*) Russia through 'political, economic, military and informational pressure');
- Interstate relations are increasingly competitive, and this competition now embraces the field of values and societal development models; in this competition, states rely on a whole specter of tools — political, financial, economic, information instruments, special services... From this point of view, it is also interesting to note that the Security strategy advocates educating school children 'as responsible citizens of Russia on the basis of traditional Russian spiritual–moral and cultural–historical values' (these are also threatened by extremist and radical ideologies, the text suggests);
- The 'erosion of the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers' is now a reality, and their attempts 'to maintain their positions in the world, including by imposing their point of view on global processes and conducting a policy to contain alternative centres of power, leads to a greater instability in international relations and growing turbulence on the global and regional levels' (elements from the Foreign policy concepts, that were also present in the Security strategy).

## 1.2 Domestic challenges

Although they underline that the Russian 'economy has been able to maintain and strengthen its potential despite the instability of the world economy and despite sanctions', the authors of the 2015 Security strategy do not propose a peculiarly rosy picture of Russia's internal situation. The Strategy seems to integrate the economic crisis — or at least stagnation or slim growth rates — as a parameter that is here to stay, at least in the mid-term perspective. The Security strategy also provides a long list of internal problems that remain to be solved: corruption, organized crime, weight of the shadow economy, lack of

<sup>8</sup> The past five years have seen a systematic effort at beefing up Russia's military presence in the area, including with the creation of a specific strategic command ('Russia in the Arctic: A Different Kind of Military Presence', [www.stratfor.com](http://www.stratfor.com), November 11, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> 'Rossiyaniye vnov' poverili v armiyu' [The Russians trust in the army again], [www.levada.ru](http://www.levada.ru), February 18, 2016.



confidence of the citizens in law and order institutions, insufficient quality of life, terrorist risks, technological backwardness, inappropriate use of public funds, rising inequalities in revenues, lowering quality of consumer goods and services, poverty, demographic problems (despite some signs of improvement), insufficient protection of individual rights and freedoms, low labour competitiveness and productivity, the persistence of the economic model based on the export of raw materials and the subsequent strong vulnerability of the country to external economic conditions, backwardness in new technologies, insufficient resilience of the financial system, decline in natural resources, unequal development amongst the regions of the Russian Federation, unattractive investment environment, capital outflow, etc.

While Russia is also endowed with a number of comparative advantages (including relatively well educated population, a developed industrial capacity, a dynamic IT sector), there is a lot here to validate President Obama's claim that Russia is a country that 'doesn't make anything'<sup>10</sup>, and Western observers' assessment that Russia's international ambitions are not justified by its real capacities and strengths. In 2014 the country accounted for merely 2.6 % of total world exports, and its share of total world imports was only 1.6 %<sup>11</sup>. Russia does not export a lot of high value-added and high-tech products (these accounted for only 1.5 % of Russia's net exports in 2012)<sup>12</sup>.

On this score, two elements should be taken into consideration by the European Union while devising new Russia strategies:

- The complex domestic situation will affect the prioritization of the military only marginally. Military spending (see 2.7) will not 'naturally' be questioned as a burden on the economy as it has been in European countries facing a budget crunch. This is due to historical factors (military tools have been prioritized over the civilian economy and social concerns for centuries), but also to the Russian government's conviction that the defense industry is the nest of Russia's best technologies and knowledge, and that it is meant to become a locomotive of the development and modernization of the national economy<sup>13</sup>. Another factor behind all this lays in the fact that Russia considers its place in the top 5 of the world arms exporters as a great power attribute — in the economic field. In other words, investing in defense is not just a source of military security, but also of jobs, money and prestige.
- The many structural problems in the Russian economic and social fabric contrast with the self-confidence expressed by Russian leaders in the strategic papers. This should not overshadow the fact that traditionally Russia has always perceived internal weaknesses as vulnerabilities that the outside world can take advantage of to erode Russia's strength. There is an obvious preoccupation about the possible dangerous interactions between domestic challenges and the external environment, in the sense that these challenges, as the Kremlin sees it, could be exploited by hostile powers to undermine Russia's great power and security interests. This in turn pushes Moscow to flex its muscles on the world stage. This is likely a factor of Russia's strong reliance on military levers to impose its status as a great power and to distract from its flawed integration in the global economy. In any case, it would be an illusion to expect Russian leaders to become more flexible because of the country's economic and other domestic problems, no matter how deep these are<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Julian Borger, 'Barack Obama: Russia Is a Regional Power Showing Weakness over Ukraine', *The Guardian*, March 25, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> World Trade Organization, 'Russian Federation', Statistics Database, September 2015  
<http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=S&Country=RU>.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew C. Kuchins, 'Russian Power Rising and Falling Simultaneously', in Ashley J. Tellis with Alison Szalwinski and Michael Wills (ed.), *Strategic Asia 2015–16: Foundations of National Power in the Asia-Pacific*, National Bureau of Asian Research, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Economists, however, are more sceptical on this score, stressing that the defense industry 'has too minimal an impact on other sectors of the economy and ... is extremely dependent on foreign supplies' (Vladislav Inozemtsev, Yulia Zhuchkova, 'The Future of the Economy and the Energy Sector', in Hiski Haukkala, Nicu Popescu (ed.), *Russian Futures 2025*, ISSUE Report, no. 26, March 2016, p. 28).

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Ischinger, 'The Russia Paradox: How to Deal with an Aggressive, Yet Weak Power', [www.eastwest.ngo](http://www.eastwest.ngo), July 6, 2016.

### 1.3 External challenges: a deep-seated focus on the West

The reading of Russia's updated strategic documents is not ambiguous about the identity of the external players that might, in its view, be tempted to play on its internal weaknesses. Although some parts of the military doctrine point to states that sponsor terrorist or radical groups and to these groups themselves, it is clear that 'the West' is the focus of Russia's threat and risk assessment while China, for example, is not explicitly and directly mentioned. The current confrontation between Russia and the West is in fact the continuation and the product of tensions accumulated before the Ukrainian crisis — and exacerbated by it. One has only to read Vladimir Putin's 2007 Munich speech to be convinced of this fact. On many key parameters that frame Russian strategic thinking — the great power claim, the search for buffer zones, the rejection of the perceived trend towards international competition in the field of values — the 'Western world' (*Zapad*) is perceived as the main challenger.

All Russian security documents explicitly single out the challenges that the policies of Western states supposedly create for Russian security (with particularly harsh words in the Security strategy). Grievances connected to what Russia sees as 'systemic problems in the Euro-Atlantic region' (Foreign policy concept), the enlargement of NATO, the location of its military infrastructure close to Russian borders, its 'offensive capabilities' and the trend towards the Alliance acquiring 'global functions', the 'symptoms' of the U.S. efforts to retain absolute military supremacy (the global antimissile system, Global Strike capabilities, militarization of space) — all these problems were mentioned in the previous versions of these doctrines.

The Security strategy indicates in quite blunt terms that Russia views Western states and organizations as obstacles to the realization of its ambitions in former Soviet countries: 'The position of the West that aims to oppose integration processes and to create hotbeds of tension in the Eurasian region exerts a negative influence on the realization of Russia's national interests'. Western criticism of Russian policies in the post-Soviet space, often described as neo-imperialistic, is all the more resented in Moscow that the Kremlin considers that NATO and the EU have expanded their own 'spheres of influence' through their enlargement and the development of wide networks of cooperative ties, including in the neighbourhood they share with Russia.

A newer element receives particular emphasis in these documents and should be paid attention. The Security strategy denounces, in the list describing threats to the security of the state and of the society, attempts to destabilize an internal situation by means of inspiring colour revolutions. This text also condemns efforts to provoke regime changes, which, in the Kremlin's view, are increasingly widespread and at times supported by military force (in the Russian understanding, this refers to Serbia in 1999, Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011). Interestingly, this challenge is mentioned in the 2014 military doctrine, which also underlines the risk of seeing the establishment of regimes in 'bordering states, whose policy threatens the interests of the Russian Federation' as well as 'activities aimed at forcibly changing the constitutional system of the Russian Federation'. All these are direct references to the colour revolutions that took place in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Kyrgyzstan (2005), the Arab spring, and, finally, the Ukrainian 'Revolution of Dignity', which Russian officials continuously describe as an anti-constitutional coup supported by the West. The demonstrations that took place across Russia after the December 2011 parliamentary elections and that Vladimir Putin blamed on the US State Department strongly enhanced this preoccupation of the Kremlin (these events were followed by increased pressure on domestic NGOs and media freedom, and led to the decision to oust USAID from Russia). The 'securitization' of such issues, by their very inclusion in an official document whose role is to expose 'the system of officially adopted views by the State on the preparation to armed protection and on armed protection of the Russian Federation', points to a hardening of the Kremlin's policy. However, it should not have come as a complete surprise. As early as in 2013, Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov underlined related concerns at the Academy of Military Science: 'The experience of military conflicts, including those linked with so-called colored revolutions in North Africa and in the Near East, confirms that a fully healthy state can in a few months or even days become the scene of a fierce

armed fight, become the victim of foreign interference, be immersed in deep chaos, humanitarian catastrophe and civil war', adding that this might be the way 'the typical war of the twenty-first century looks like'<sup>15</sup>. In addition it should be noted that the new Foreign policy concept asserts that Moscow intends 'to prevent military interventions or other forms of outside interference contrary to international law, specifically the principle of sovereign equality of States, under the pretext of implementing the 'responsibility to protect' concept'.

Cooperation with the United States, NATO and the European Union, the strategic documents say in substance, must be based on the principles of equality and respect for each other's interests.

## 2 Tools and levers of Russia's security policy

### 2.1 Russia's reliance on military tools

All new strategic documents emphasize the importance of the role of military force in international relations, suggesting that Russia has a legitimate right to develop the adequate military power to answer this international trend (which, again, it tends to attribute primarily to the West). Since the mid-2000s, the Russian military has become again a tool in Russia's assertion on the world stage. In a move considered by many as a turning point in Moscow's international strategy, the Kremlin decided to use force in Georgia in 2008. As seen from the Kremlin, the tense and complex international environment the country faces fully justifies the financial effort devoted to the modernization of its military. It is also a matter of international standing: Russia wants to restore its image *vis-à-vis* the West, China (to avoid the seat of the junior partner in the bilateral relationship), its neighbors (be it to intimidate them or to offer them an efficient security umbrella, thus retaining their loyalty<sup>16</sup>).... Russia's motivations and positions in all these directions are, of course, diverse but it perceives that possessing a credible military force is one key condition of its diplomatic and security interests being taken into account by others.

#### 2.1.1 Russia's revitalised capabilities and threat assessment

Serious military reform has been pursued after the Georgia war, which displayed the numerous weak points of Russia's military organization. While Russia had attained its strategic goals in the South Caucasus, the way its troops had performed had shown that the military was still plagued with many flaws and problems. 'The Georgian war forced our army to look at itself in the mirror, and what we saw wasn't pretty. We thought we were awesome, but it turned out we were ugly, with big spots on our nose and teeth', says Viktor Baranets, a retired army colonel and military analyst for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*<sup>17</sup>. Since then, the Russian military has lived through unprecedented restructuring, bringing out a real departure from the Soviet model — i.e. a huge mass-mobilization army, with millions of reservists, structured around divisions (most of them understaffed divisions, comprising primarily cadre personnel and aimed at being replenished with reservists in case of need).

The main goal of the 2008 reform was to improve the combat readiness of available troops and to enhance the ability to use them swiftly. This implied cutting the number of understaffed, ill-equipped formations to replace them with more agile and more potent units. Drastic cuts in the bloated officer corps were carried out (135,000 officer positions out of 355,000 were eliminated). In the army, the traditional division was suppressed and replaced by the brigade as the main formation. The ultimate goal is to bring these smaller brigades to full strength and to have them better equipped and more autonomous than the former divisions (the process of organizing three categories of brigades — heavy, medium, light — to get an ability

<sup>15</sup> 'Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii' [The value of science is in foresight], *Voenna-Promyshlennyyi Kurer*, February 27, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> See box on the Collective Security Treaty Organization (p. 16).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Shaun Walker, 'Syrian Mission Restores Pride in Russian Military after Years of Decay', *The Guardian*, 15 March 2015.

to face contingencies of various formats started in late 2011). Only the airborne troops (*vozdushno-desantnye voyska*, VDV) retained divisions. Together with the Special Forces, the VDV stand at the core of the rapid reaction force that the Russian military is establishing. It should be noted, however, that in 2015, decisions were taken about the re-creation of a number of divisions, which appears as a 'response' to the measures taken by NATO to reassure central Eastern members but also to the deterioration of relations with Ukraine<sup>18</sup>. The military leadership has also done much to streamline the command structure in order to enhance the general coherence and coordination, thus efficiency, of the various components of the armed forces. Command and control (C2) has noticeably improved. The number of military districts was cut from six to four in 2010; the four districts perform administrative and logistical functions, but become joint operational-strategic commands in cases of exercises and contingencies (in such circumstances, they command and control all forces — ground, air, Navy — under their supervision). As a response to Russia's concerns related to the perceived degradation of its security situation in the Arctic, a Joint Strategic Command 'North' was created, in late 2015, on the basis of the Northern Fleet.

As was stressed previously, the West is perceived as posing security challenges to Russia. However, the Western technological advance in the military field that the Russians had an opportunity to witness in Iraq or Kosovo wars has made the previous model of preparing for war with the West (a huge, conscription-based mass mobilization army) obsolete. Indeed, as stressed by General Gerasimov, 'frontal engagements of large formations of forces at the strategic and operational level are gradually becoming a thing of the past', while 'long-distance, contactless actions against the adversary' are becoming a major means of achieving one's goals. The materialization of the Chinese potential military challenge, although it is probably taken into account in defense planning, is considered to be preventable through the development of a dense web of relations with the PRC. The nuclear deterrent, the modernization of which has accelerated since the mid-2000s, combined with the multi-tier aerospace defense system that Russia is currently forming<sup>19</sup> is seen as offering a solid hedge *vis-à-vis* these risks. Power projection beyond the borders of Russia and its immediate vicinity is now a goal (as demonstrated by the Syria operation, but also by Russian participation to anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden) but for the time being only for limited operations, with clearly delineated goals. More ambitious plans might be considered for the longer term as they will depend on the economic situation, the evolution of the international security landscape, and Russia's ability to get access to military facilities of foreign countries. Ambitions are also constrained, in the current situation, by the rather difficult state of the Russian navy and shipbuilding, at least as concerns blue-water surface ships.

Despite the perception that threats and challenges are present in all strategic directions, the basic plan that has supported the military reform launched in 2008 is in fact aimed at making the armed forces more efficient for the contingencies that they are most likely to face. These are local conflicts, deleterious activities of militant or even transnational crime groups and possibly the management of large-scale social and political disorders — all this in the neighborhood of the country, which happens to be, as stressed earlier, a major priority in Russia's foreign policy. It was these contingencies that dictated the 'shock therapy'<sup>20</sup> the Kremlin imposed on the military right after the Georgia war. The structure of the Russian armed forces inherited from the Soviet Union was deemed unfit for efficiently waging wars of the kind of those that Russia fought in the post-Cold war context — in Chechnya, in Georgia —, or that it could have experimented (for example the Kyrgyz crisis in 2010 that involved ethnic clashes). Such situations require

<sup>18</sup> Anna Maria Dwyer, 'Russia Beefs up Military Potential in the Country's Western Areas', *PISM Bulletins*, no. 35, June 13, 2016; Ruslan Pukhov, 'Rossiya-NATO: Nasha karta Afriki' [Russia-NATO: Our Map of Africa], *Vedomosti*, July 15, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> On this subject Russian strategists have long developed their thinking, drawing many lessons from the first Gulf war in the early 1990s. Only recently has the Russian military obtained the funding to build the new aerospace defense system — and overcome the bureaucratic infighting that had long hampered the realization of the corresponding vision.

<sup>20</sup> To quote K. Giles' expression (Keir Giles, 'A New Phase in Russian Military Transformation', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 27, no. 1, 2014, p. 148).

rapid mobilization of troops and the deployment of agile groups of forces that are at the core of the military restructuring going on in the Russian military. An extra motivation for following this path was the announcement in late 2010 that NATO intended to withdraw forces from Afghanistan: six years later, the Russians fear a spillover of growing Afghan instability in Central Asia and on their own territory, all these risks being aggravated, in the Russian perspective, by growing trouble in the Middle East.

Military reform has been backed by strong political will on the part of the political leadership, as illustrated by the steadily increasing military budgets. According to SIPRI databases, Russian military expenditure stood at 31.3 billion \$ in 1995, 28.8 in 2000, 43 in 2005, 60.9 in 2010, 91 in 2015 (constant 2014). In recent years, the growing share of GDP devoted to defense has reflected the determination of the Russian government to maintain the effort to modernize the armed forces, in particular their re-equipment. This effort paid off, as one can conclude from the rather well organized and efficient operations in Crimea and Syria. While limited in size, these have shown that the Russian military has now decisively departed from the sorry state it was in when Vladimir Putin became the president of the Russian Federation in 2000.

In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, which the Kremlin presents as the product of a direct clash of interests between Moscow on the one hand, NATO, the European Union and the United States on the other hand, Russian jets have increasingly tested the defenses of NATO members, sometimes violating their airspace. Numerous, and, for many of them, large-scale military exercises and mobilization activities have fueled the image of the Russian military as a resurgent force. They create a lot of concern in neighboring countries, where it is feared that snap inspections (which started in 2013) could serve as a cover for preparations for military operations against them<sup>21</sup>. But the trend showing a more active Russian military on the world stage appeared earlier. In 2007, Russia resumed regular strategic bomber flights, which had stopped after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian Navy has widened its presence on the world seas, especially in the Mediterranean, where Russia has resumed a permanent presence in 2013, albeit on a much smaller scale than in Soviet times.

Combat training, which was sacrificed in the Yeltsin era due to the financial crunch, has been a key focus in the Russian MoD's effort to rebuild national military capabilities. In the past few years, Russia has significantly increased the pace and size of its military exercises. Army, air, naval, nuclear and airborne forces have all been involved, separately or together, in manoeuvres held in all military districts (MD), sometimes with foreign countries. Exercises are now planned and executed at all levels — command post exercises (CPX) testing command structures (headquarters) and their communications networks without actual engagement of forces; field training exercises (FTX) under simulated combat conditions in open field; combined training exercises (CTE) with the armed forces of foreign countries; combined arms live fire exercises encompassing joint manoeuvres (army, navy, air force, etc.) held at the operational or tactical levels... The scenarios of drills have also become more complex. It is not rare that in parallel to annual strategic exercises, other drills are conducted 'in other parts of Russia or with a different focus', which makes the political and military leadership face more complex decision-making and tasks<sup>22</sup>. The Russian leadership is all the more inclined to spend a lot of money on combat training that military exercises allow to impress neighbours and potential adversaries and to send strategic messages. Strategic mobility has been an important element in Russian exercises in recent years<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> See Mark Galeotti, 'Heavy Metal Diplomacy: Russia's Political Use of its Military in Europe since 2014', [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu), December 19, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight – Russia's Major Military Exercises 2011-2014*, FOI, December 2015, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Roger N. McDermott, *Russia's Strategic Mobility. Supporting 'Hard Power' to 2020?*, FOI, April 2013.



## 2.1.2 The military and Russia's international ambitions

Under Vladimir Putin, the military factor has clearly (and early) been brought to the fore as an important element in the effort aimed at reasserting Russia's prestige and authority on the world stage after more than a decade of dramatic diplomatic drawdown. In the previous years, the severe crisis of the armed forces had almost 'neutralized' the image of Russia as a military power. In the early twenty-first century, 'most states continue to see the maintenance of a powerful conventional military... as an instrument of policy, but also as an essential attribute of a strong state and a global actor', especially 'states aspiring to great power status'<sup>24</sup>. As was stressed previously, Russia has never ceased to claim such a status since the sixteenth century, and has, under Putin, tried really hard to regain it. The period from the 1990s till the mid-2000s that saw the Russian state downplay, primarily out of necessity, the role of military instruments in the advancement of its international interests is unquestionably over.

Vladimir Putin has always been unambiguous in expressing his belief that without a credible military force, a country is exposed to pressure by other states. In an article on defense that he published during the 2012 presidential campaign, he justified his determination to continue to build a stronger military in the following terms: 'in conditions of world economic and other tensions, there is always a temptation on the part of some to resolve their problems at others' expense, through pressure and coercion. It is no wonder that we already hear some voices saying that 'objectively' the question will soon be asked of whether resources of global significance should be declared as being above national sovereignty. We must exclude any such possibility, even a hypothetical one, with respect to Russia. This means that we should not tempt anybody with our weakness'<sup>25</sup>. A number of domestic and international events have come to stimulate Vladimir Putin's eagerness to strengthen the country's military capabilities. First, he was obviously shocked by his realization, when the Kremlin decided to send the military again to Chechnya in 1999, that gathering rapidly a more or less potent force of 65,000 men was a very difficult, if not impossible, undertaking<sup>26</sup>. Vladimir Putin is also convinced that things might have turned up differently (i.e. less negatively from the point of view of Russian interests) in Serbia (1999) or Iraq (2003) had Russia been able to show its military muscle to try and influence these situations. This should be taken into account in attempts at comprehending the motives behind Moscow's decision to use force in Ukraine or in Syria. It was spurred by Moscow's resolve to avoid further unfavorable political and geopolitical changes in places where it considers having strategic interests to defend. Vladimir Putin obviously judges that acting from a position of strength is also the right way to respond to the perceived Western challenges, and to 'contain' those of the West's initiatives that might be contrary to its interests. This is clearly a factor of the multiplication of provocative military moves close to the territory or the airspace of NATO members or of partners of the Alliance and of recurrent nuclear messaging.

The military factor has also been central to Russia's constant effort to preserve its influence in what it officially sees as its 'sphere of privileged interests'<sup>27</sup> — i.e. the former Soviet republics (to the exception of the Baltic States). The notion that Russia faces stiff competition there, especially from Western powers, has been comforted by the conflict in Ukraine, which Russian officials present as an armed anti-constitutional coup supported by the West<sup>28</sup>. Consequently, the 'near abroad' features more prominently in the 2014 version of the military doctrine. This document mentions the importance of 'strengthening the system of

<sup>24</sup> Bettina Renz, 'Why Russia is Reviving Its Conventional Military Power', *Parameters*, vol. 46, no. 2, Summer 2016, p. 24, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Putin, 'Byt' sil'nymi: Garantii natsional'noy bezopasnosti dlya Rossii' [Being Strong: The Guarantees of National Security for Russia], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, February 17, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Vladimir Putin's speech at the Federal Assembly, May 10, 2006,

[http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2006/05/10/1357\\_type63372type63374type82634\\_105546.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2006/05/10/1357_type63372type63374type82634_105546.shtml)

<sup>27</sup> This expression was used by Dmitry Medvedev when he was the president of the Russian Federation.

<sup>28</sup> 'West's Support for State Coup in Ukraine Prime Cause of Crisis in Ukraine – Putin', TASS, June 19, 2015.

collective security in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization' (CSTO) and of building up its potential. Security cooperation within the CIS is also cited, as well as interaction with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia's separatist territories, whose 'independence' Russia recognized in 2008). Moscow maintains a number of military bases in the former USSR, including in the separatist regions of Georgia and of Moldova (Transnistria). As viewed from Moscow, military presence in this geopolitical space is an essential part of its strategy of imposing itself as the predominant regional power since none of the other big states involved in the area can boast a commitment of this specific nature<sup>29</sup>.

The **Collective Security Treaty Organization** (CSTO) was created in 2002 on the basis of the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty signed in May 1992. It unites Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan suspended its participation in June 2012. The CSTO is an observer at the UN General Assembly.

Its agenda is hybrid — including both collective security and joint defense (aggression against one member is considered an aggression against all). The Collective Rapid Reaction Force (KSOR) established in 2009 is thus supposed to be able to counter military aggression, to conduct anti-terrorist operations, to fight transnational crime and drug trafficking... The CSTO has for several years conducted the Channel operation (anti-drug trafficking), Nelegal operation (illegal immigration), as well as 'Rubezh' exercises (rapid reaction forces for Central Asia).

Politically, the CSTO has been weakened by the diverse security perspectives of its members (although on paper this problem has been solved through the establishment of three regional sub-systems – Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia). For example, in recent months, Armenia has complained more openly that its CSTO partners show insufficient interest in supporting its position in the conflict with Azerbaijan. In 2008, Russia's CSTO partners did not follow its lead in recognizing the 'independence' of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In terms of actual capabilities, the CSTO's potential remains limited despite constant talk of building up its military component. This is due to both the members' lack of political will and of military resources.

The CSTO has increasingly focused on Central Asia. Russia and Central Asian states share both a genuine concern about the rise of radical Islam in connection with the troubled situation in the Middle East and in Afghanistan and an inclination to use these challenges to justify repressive actions against opposition groups or delays in domestic reforms.

Russia has been promoting the CSTO as one of the symbols of its geopolitical pre-eminence in the post-Soviet space (members are supposed to coordinate foreign policies, and joint communiqués often reflect Russian international positions). CSTO is Russia-dominated: its military forces are overwhelmingly superior to that of any other CSTO member, its Secretary General has been a Russian general since its inception, and the permanent structures of CSTO are located in Moscow.

Integration with the former Soviet republics in the field of hard power is implicitly conceived as a factor that makes Russian regional imprint more significant than that of other powers. That is why Moscow is not pushing too hard for a more pronounced show of solidarity within the CSTO — convinced as it is that, given the disparity of its members' security interests and their voiced concern with Russian domination instincts, this might jeopardize this formal integration scheme. In other words, a *façade* of military integration in a multilateral framework under Russian leadership is what is important in Moscow's perspective. And it is quite likely that in case of a serious crisis involving

<sup>29</sup> See also Directorate-General for External Policies, SEDE, European Parliament, Workshop on 'Russian Military Presence in the Eastern Partnership Countries', 2016 (with the contributions of Anna Maria Dyner and Gaïdz Minassian).

one of the CSTO members, most of the crisis management would be carried out bilaterally, between this state and Russia, on the basis of their military ties and cooperation.

In December 2016, CSTO General Secretary Nikolai Bordyuzha announced that the Organization intended to discuss possible responses to the growing military activity of NATO within the borders of the military bloc (a clear reference to the measures decided by NATO to enhance its support to Poland and the Baltic states). Comparisons with NATO are sometimes induced by similarities in the respective agendas and functionalities of the two organizations. However, symmetry stops here — by all institutional and operational standards, NATO is far stronger than CSTO, which can only abusively be regarded as a 'Eurasian NATO'.

### 2.1.3 Tackling perceived asymmetries with the West

The recent effort to transform the Russian armed forces has produced a military, parts of which are fully combat-ready, professional, well trained, and able to conduct complex operations. The quite calibrated Crimea and Syria operations have partly illustrated this evolution, especially as concerns special forces and airborne troops. But these operations have not been of a scale that allows to draw general lessons about the real state of the armed forces. And the bulk of the Russian military, relying on conscription and uneven levels of modern equipment, does not offer Russia the operational capabilities that would allow to cover the quite extensive and multifaceted threat assessment that was described in the first section. The Russian leadership has nonetheless worked to address this caveat.

These problems and their likely persistence make it difficult for Russia to contemplate catching up with NATO quantitatively, qualitatively, technologically: Russian conventional military power continues and will continue to lag behind the United States and NATO in terms of size (of spending, of personnel) and technological level. In recent years, the Russian military has devised responses that seem to be conceived as tools — both military and non-military — that should allow to prevent conflict, or, in the worst case scenario, to ensure deterrence of further 'aggression' ('to prevent and shape conflict' in an ensemble of tools and practices that may constitute what the Russians call 'strategic deterrence'<sup>30</sup>). It means that the use of force, when it cannot be avoided, should be calibrated in a way that deters opponents, including more capable ones, from moving further: in other words, 'Russia aims to achieve politically decisive outcomes with, if possible, no or only a limited and overt use of military force, while being prepared to act militarily, with devastating effect at the operational level, if necessary'<sup>31</sup>. The focus has shifted from the accumulation of seemingly unlimited military power to devising new concepts that integrate conventional, nuclear, and unconventional elements of military power in order to build a complex toolkit for facing various contingencies. Russia has, among other things, developed at an accelerated pace anti-access / area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities (air and missile defenses, surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, land, air and sea-launched cruise missile batteries, layered anti-submarine warfare capabilities) in zones where, Russian strategists believe, the country could face external military pressure in the future. This has been the case in Crimea, Kaliningrad, and the Arctic. NATO officials have repeatedly expressed concern that these capabilities can limit the Alliance's possibilities for action, including in regions/countries that are part of its zone of responsibility. Electronic warfare is also set to become more prominent in Russian military toolbox.

The fact that Russia has continued to dwell quite heavily on its status as a nuclear power in the context of its military operations in both Ukraine and Syria, where the risk of a confrontation with major powers could

<sup>30</sup> See Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, 'Russian Strategic Deterrence', *Survival*, vol. 58, no. 4, August-September 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'Back to the Future? Russia's Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs, and Cold War Comparisons', *NATO Research Paper*, NATO Defense College, no. 120, October 2015, p. 2.



not be completely excluded, may be indicative of the fact that Moscow does not see the plight of its military as brilliant as many Western top level officials and experts often assert. Nuclear weapons appear to keep an important role, as was suggested by the nuclear signaling and gesticulation in the context of the Ukrainian conflict, especially in 2014<sup>32</sup>. There has been a debate going on in the West about whether Russia is now de-emphasizing the nuclear component of its security and defense policy. The Russians feel that the deterrence rationale has been increasingly challenged in the past fifteen years. One factor of this assessment resides in what the Russians see as the 'strategic coupling' of US antimissile defense and prompt global strike capabilities<sup>33</sup>. Another factor might be the recognition of 'the limited efficiency of nuclear weapons in deterring conventional and non-traditional security threats'<sup>34</sup>. Quite certainly, Russian strategists take all these parameters into account when they think in prospective terms. However, at the current stage, it seems that they seek to keep the widest range of tools as possible. And in 2016, nuclear weapons are still very much present in defense planning, providing Russia with strategic comfort in front of the West's perceived pressure. The scenario of the various exercises that, since 1999, have featured nuclear first use, with calibrated nuclear strikes designed to prevent an escalation of a conventional conflict and obtain the end of hostilities by the opponent, remains on the table.

Non-military instruments too seem to play an increasingly prominent role. NATO is concerned that Russia could resort more frequently to the complex mix of tactics and tools it used in Crimea and Donbas. Military tools were used<sup>35</sup> but they were combined with cyber-attacks, political and economic pressure, and intensive disinformation campaigns. Thus, Russia's toolbox for coercive action is not situated only in the military field (information warfare, economic and political pressure, psy ops...); and the military factor promises to take on very ambiguous forms (disguised, denied, limited, merged with the use of other instruments...) in the future. What preoccupies NATO officials most is the resulting blurring of the line between war and peace (non-war), which has triggered fears that Russia could play the same complex game with a NATO member country and complicate decision-making within the Alliance by creating ambiguous situations and intimidating some of the members, to the detriment of allied consensus. Another question is whether Russia would consider these options only as a response to perceived hostile action by an opponent (which is already problematic given the traditionally very defensive outlook that guides Russia's foreign and security policies), or whether it would be prepared to resort to them in a more offensive, opportunistic mode.

It should be noted that the Russians consider that this complex mix of instruments is actually what Western powers have practiced in various places of the world in recent years. General Gerasimov, while discussing what he calls the 'new typical wars of the twenty-first century', the ones starting with a colour revolution-like event, stresses that 'the role of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals has risen, in a number of cases these means, in terms of effectiveness, significantly surpassed the force of arms', with 'the large use of political, economic, information, humanitarian and other non-military measures', 'completed with military measures of a covert nature', including information warfare<sup>36</sup> and special forces

<sup>32</sup> Jacek Durkalec, 'Nuclear-Backed 'Little Green Men': Nuclear Messaging in the Ukraine Crisis', *PISM Reports*, July 2015, pp. 7-19.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Grushko, Russian representative to NATO, quoted by Interfax, 12 May 2016.

<sup>34</sup> 'Russian Strategic Deterrence', p. 9. This argument is countered by experts that stress that Russia is developing very low yield and low collateral damage nuclear weapons.

<sup>35</sup> Special Forces and military intelligence in particular, but also military exercises – which, in the context of the Ukraine conflict, were used either to distract attention from actions elsewhere and to intimidate or create doubts about Moscow's military intentions. For example, major (150,000) exercises (surprise inspections) were ordered on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in the Central and Western military districts before the 'Crimea operation'. Units were deployed along Ukraine's border in a show of force aimed at deterring the Ukrainian government from acting and, as a signal to the West, at displaying Russia's determination to defend its perceived interests in the conflict.

<sup>36</sup> In the same speech at the Academy of Military Science, Gerasimov asserted that 'the information confrontation opens wide asymmetric possibilities to reduce the combat potential of the adversary. In North Africa we witnessed the realization of

operations; finally, he concludes, the overt use of force appears only at a later stage, under the form of peacemaking (*mirotvortcheskaya deyatelnost*) or crisis management, in order to achieve the final success in the conflict<sup>37</sup>...

## 2.2 Russia's diplomatic activism

Despite all the rust and incompetence that are still plaguing large parts of the Russian military, two factors should not be underestimated — one is Russia's feeling that it is facing a very hostile world, and that only credible military tools can protect it; the second is the Russian leaders' determination to use all means available to defend what they see as the country's strategic interests, a determination that is served by the facilitated decision-making on the use of force that the authoritarian nature of the regime allows for. However, despite the attention that Russian leaders — as well as their Western counterparts — have devoted to Moscow's military muscle flexing, the Kremlin has also pursued what two European scholars have defined as a 'hyperactive foreign policy'<sup>38</sup>. Russia's diplomatic activism is an indirect recognition of the limitations that still characterize Russia's ability to project power and to conduct ambitious military operations far from the national borders (see 2.1.1). It is meant to ensure that Russia's standing as one of the new 'centres of influence' is widely recognized, and to impose the idea of the West's declining influence in world affairs. It has been all the more energetic that Russian leaders consider there is a window of opportunity that should not be missed, created by the very uncertain transition period in Washington and the inward-looking attitude that the EU has displayed in recent years due to multiple crises (Greece, migrants, Brexit...).

Russia has clearly made it a priority goal to demonstrate that it is not merely a regional power (President Obama stated in 2014 that 'Russia is a regional power that is threatening some of its immediate neighbors, not out of strength but out of weakness'<sup>39</sup>). Syria has been a key laboratory on this front. On Syria, indeed, Russia has combined military action with intense diplomatic action. Russia has modified the political landscape around the conflict not only by using its military, although admittedly this has been an essential factor, but also by showing an ability to talk to all involved players. Although Moscow has not attained its initial goal of obtaining an international coalition that would have seen it siding with Western states (and major regional powers) 'on an equal basis', it has made it unavoidable for Washington to discuss Syria with Moscow.

Russia has also promoted an agenda of denunciation of the West's, especially the United States', role in undermining the rules of the international game, thus trying to affect its credibility. For example, the Security strategy denounces the weakening of the system of global security and system of treaties and agreements in the arms control sphere. This is a reference, among other things, to Russia's constant (since the late 1990s) criticism of Western military operations that were conducted without a mandate of the UN Security Council (Kosovo, Iraq), of Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty, etc. The West has replied by pointing to Russia's own ambiguities in fulfilling its legally-binding international commitments (direct involvement in separatist conflicts in the former Soviet Union, apparent non-compliance with the INF treaty, of the principle of inviolability of borders in Ukraine...).

On a more strategic level, another element in Moscow's strategy has been to highlight its ability to develop strong relations with all leading powers of the emerging 'multipolar international system' (Foreign policy concept). Russia has worked hard to demonstrate that it enjoys the support of other powers that are concerned about the West's presumed inclination to interfere in other countries' internal affairs and lack

technologies of influence on state structures and population through reliance on information networks' ('Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii', see footnote 15).

<sup>37</sup> 'Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii'.

<sup>38</sup> Introduction of *Russian Futures 2025*, by Hiski Haukkala and Nicu Popescu, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> 'Barack Obama: Russia Is a Regional Power...', see footnote 10.

of willingness to share international power with rising powers. This strategy has been pursued consistently since the late 1990s, starting with the 'strategic partnership' with China (which has gradually become a platform for the two countries to promote the establishment of a 'multipolar' world order, the essence of which is to counterbalance perceived Western hegemony) and the Russia–India–China (RIC) strategic triangle, which was initiated in 1998 by Moscow, gathers once a year at the foreign minister level and is supposed to be another incarnation of the multipolar order. In this perspective, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS grouping have been of particular value to the Kremlin. Their meetings have been opportunities to declare their members' resentment towards Western policies — unilateral sanctions, lack of willingness to share influence in international organizations (IMF, World Bank, etc.), consequences of the 'hegemony of the dollar'... Russia, which has also promoted the importance of G20 as a more legitimate and appropriate forum than G7, has worked to convince the rest of the world of the rising influence of these organizations/groupings, especially in a context where it needs to counter the West's argument that the Ukraine conflict has isolated Russia. From this point of view, the SCO's decision to integrate India and Pakistan as new members and the BRICS' progress in building up its own system of financial institutions are evolutions that are worth advertising. In these groupings, Russia has promoted the discussion of some of the concerns mentioned in its Security strategy, for example those related to the 'attempts by some states to use economic methods, instruments of financial, trade, investment and technological policy to solve their geopolitical problems' (this points to sanctions but also to what Russia — and others — sees as 'exclusive' trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership). As stressed in the Security strategy, the best option to meet such challenges resides in regional or sub-regional agreements (one understands that it is all about the Eurasian Economic Union, the SCO, the BRICS...) as well as in using regional currencies — all being presented as hedges against crisis phenomena.

However, Russia's diplomatic activity is not only a function of the crisis in Russia–West relations. It reflects realism on Moscow's part about the vulnerability of its international position. The weaknesses of its power (economic, soft, even military) mean that being a 'centre of influence' is possible only through association (with former Soviet states in the first place as was stressed before, but also via participation in international organizations and fora and partnership with other leading powers). Russia's moving to a more active Asian agenda since the early 2000s (and so far with only limited progress) is of course a consequence of its degraded relations with Western powers. However it also means that Moscow recognizes the weakness of its positions in Asia. This is in large part due to the historically rooted Western-centrism of its international policy. The Kremlin feels this should be corrected given the rising strategic and economic importance of Asia, in particular the Asia-Pacific<sup>40</sup>.

Thus, Russia's 'hyperactive' diplomacy is also an implicit reflection of the fact that Russia, while certainly satisfied with what it sees as the West's 'leadership crisis' and trying to use fully this window of opportunity to impose the idea that it is a key architect of the emerging new world order, is at the same time not fully comfortable with this new order (which, as was previously stressed, it sees as chaotic and unpredictable). In its current situation, Russia is probably not completely confident that it will get a gratifying role in it. For example, the Chinese and Russian presidents' decision, in 2015, to connect the Eurasian Economic Union and the new Silk Road looks more like an attempt by Moscow to use the dynamics of Chinese projects (which it cannot really oppose) in order to reposition itself on the Eurasian stage at a time when its own integration project has been hurt by the Ukrainian crisis and the wariness it has inspired Russia's partners, including Kazakhstan and Belarus. In this sense, it is worth considering the possibility that Russia's permanent show of military force is also an indirect message to other great powers such as China, with

<sup>40</sup> In the mid-2000s, the Russian government had already assessed that future demand for Russia's oil and gas exports would be far higher in Asia than anywhere else. This corresponded in time with the Kremlin's becoming increasingly concerned about the situation in its deindustrialized and depopulated far eastern territories. The global recession of 2008–9 reinforced this 'Asian vector' in Russian foreign activities.

which the balance of power is not favorable to Russia – a message that says that Russia, despite its internal and international weaknesses, needs to be taken seriously. An active diplomatic presence on all strategic fronts is considered as a hedge against possible risks of international downgrading. It remains to be seen whether this sense of Russia's vulnerability in the emerging world order could benefit, in a way or another, the relationship between Russia and the EU, which, despite all the tensions, is still supported by quite a solid economic basement and a diversified fabric of human ties. However, one can only notice that the EU seems to feature quite low in the priorities of Moscow's foreign policy agenda, and mainly in a regional, not global, context.

In these conditions, what are the implications for the European Union of Russia's new security policy? How to navigate between necessary cautiousness, given Russia's assertiveness and the vulnerability of EU consensus, and engagement, dictated, among other things, by the fact that Russia remains interested in the future of the Euro-Atlantic region in a 'long term' perspective (Foreign policy concept)? What are the EU's margins for manoeuvre, knowing that it is not in the best position to address the Russian challenge in its military dimension? Does Russia's implicit discomfort in the emerging new world order offer leverage for the EU to engage Moscow productively?

### 3 Russia – EU relations

Despite the current crisis situation, the EU and Russia agree that ties cannot be broken. The EU's global strategy recognizes that 'the EU and Russia are interdependent' (p. 33). Russia's Foreign policy concept stresses that '[The] EU remains an important trade and economic and foreign policy partner for Russia'.

#### 3.1 Russia's vision of the European Union

In recent years, however, seeking a strategic partnership with the European Union has become less prominent in Russia's general strategy. This evolution had gathered speed even before the EU decided to impose sanctions on Russia. Moscow increasingly perceives the EU, which for years has faced many political and social problems, as being in decline and strategically less and less relevant (*see below*). As a result, partnership with the EU, although still important economically, appears less valuable in terms of Russia's sustaining its international standing than strategic convergence with China and other major rising powers. It is obvious that despite their rather unfriendly atmosphere, relations with the United States have featured much more importantly in Moscow's security and strategic agenda for several years. It is interesting to note here that Russian political scientists advocate a kind of a pause in the partnership with the European Union<sup>41</sup>. The looming relative decline in energy relations will likely contribute to this trend. Of course, Moscow invests a lot of hope – and political energy<sup>42</sup> – in forthcoming elections in a number of EU member states. The Kremlin certainly expects that, should leaders with a 'pro-Russian' orientation come to power in Paris or Berlin, the already fragile EU consensus would be broken, sanctions would be abolished, and Russia's room for maneuver in Europe would be expanded. But, should this wish come true, which at this stage can certainly not be taken for granted, it would not necessarily change Russia's rather skeptical assessment of the EU as a strategic partner. This will depend on many variables – the future U.S. administration's transatlantic and Russia policies, the European Union's own reaction to the emergence of a new political landscape in key member states, the depth of the changes these states would introduce in their Russia policy, and, ultimately, the EU's ability to strengthen itself as a strategic player.

<sup>41</sup> Andrei Zolotov, 'Detachment rather Than Estrangement Will Save Russia-European Relations', [www.russia-direct.org](http://www.russia-direct.org), November 2, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Developing ties with political personalities and parties, trying to build up influence in Europe through Russian media in foreign languages... (see 3.2). In November 2016, Chancellor Merkel said that she thought that Russia may try to influence the 2017 German elections through cyber attacks and a disinformation campaign.

It should be made clear that Russia's foreign and security policy is not motivated by a benign vision of the European Union. This is formulated quite clearly in its new Foreign policy concept: 'Systemic problems in the Euro-Atlantic region that have accumulated over the last quarter century are manifested in the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) **and the European Union (EU)** along with their refusal to begin implementation of political statements regarding the creation of a common European security and cooperation framework, have resulted in a serious crisis in the relations between Russia and the Western States. The containment policy adopted by the United States and its allies against Russia, and political, economic, information and other pressure Russia is facing from them undermine regional and global stability, are detrimental to the long-term interests of all sides and run counter to the growing need for cooperation and addressing transnational challenges and threats in today's world'. Brussels has been accused, together with the United States, of having supported the 'anticonstitutional coup in Ukraine', thus triggering a profound fracture inside the Ukrainian society and the armed conflict, which has created a hotbed of durable instability near Russia's border (Security strategy).

The widespread idea that Moscow sees the EU as a lesser challenge to Russian interests than NATO should therefore be modulated. The negative Russian perspective on the EU is linked to several factors:

- The EU, in Moscow's view, has taken a more negative stance on Russia as a result of its post-Cold war waves of enlargement; this reflects some pressure from, as the Russians see it, 'a firm anti-Russian coalition of Poland, Sweden and the Baltic states'<sup>43</sup> (Poland and Sweden, together with the United Kingdom, were among the most fervent supporters of the Eastern Partnership, which contributed to Moscow's perception of the EP as being geopolitically-motivated, *see below*).
- As was stressed before, Russia is concerned about what it sees as an international competition based on rival systems of values and societal development models. On this front, in the Russian perspective, the European Union appears as a major challenger. Quite silent on this aspect in the 1990s, resurgent Russia has repeatedly and explicitly rejected the normative dimension of the EU's external action (the fact that Brussels tends to expect its partners to adhere to its norms, standards, regulations and values). Moscow has emphasized its intention to develop relations with Brussels 'on the principles of equality and respect for each other's interests' (Foreign policy concept), and, focused as it is on the preservation of its 'sovereignty', refuses that the principles and rules that drive the EU–Russia relationship are 'imposed' by the European Union. This has been expressed in the context of the negotiations on a new EU-Russia partnership and cooperation agreement, which has been deadlocked for several years. Another illustration could be found in the divergence between Russia and the EU on the nature of their 'partnerships for modernization': Russia hoped these would help to obtain transfers of technology and industrial partnerships, while the EU — and many of its member states individually — proved more concerned with democratization, economic liberalization, rule of law and governance issues<sup>44</sup>.
- While Russia has resisted the normative power of the EU, it remains concerned that this power could be applied more successfully to some of its neighbours, including through the instruments of the Eastern Partnership and association agreements<sup>45</sup>. It is in this sense that Russia sees the European

<sup>43</sup> This coalition, two influential Russian political scientists say, has 'enjoyed ... tangible support from influential forces in the old European core countries and, naturally, in the United States' (Alexei Miller, Fyodor Lukyanov, 'Detachment Instead of Confrontation: Post-European Russia in Search of Self-Sufficiency', <http://www.kreisky-forum.org>, October 2016, p. 18).

<sup>44</sup> See Laure Delcour, 'The EU and Russia's Modernisation: One Partnership, Two Views', *LSE Ideas*, April 5, 2011, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2011/04/the-eu-and-russia%E2%80%99s-modernisation-one-partnership-two-views>.

<sup>45</sup> A Russian political scientist sums up how Russia sees it on this score: 'the emergence of the Customs Union in 2010 and the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 became a challenge to the EU. The challenge compelled the EU to accelerate its policy in order



Union as a geopolitical rival in the post-Soviet space. Russia is definitely concerned that its neighbours' gradually absorbing EU norms and standards will lessen its influence over them — an influence that often materializes through inter-elite channels, informal, sometimes corrupt economic and investment schemes. The successful implementation of the association agreements between the EU and the Eastern partners would transform the latter 'from a zone where Russia's elite can do business into one where they cannot', the Director of the Russia Institute at King's College sums up<sup>46</sup>. One of the purposes of the Eurasian Economic Union, Ukraine was supposed to be part of, was and still is to contain the *rapprochement* of its members with the European Union.

- On this the EU's and Russia's positions appear hard to reconcile. The EU's assertion that it 'will stand united in upholding ... each country's right to choose its future freely'<sup>47</sup> appears as a clear reference to its rejection of Russia's claim to a 'sphere of privileged interests' in the former Soviet Union. In the section devoted to Russia, the EU's Global Strategy emphasizes its intention to 'enhance the resilience of [its] eastern neighbours, and uphold their right to determine freely their approach towards the EU' (resilience being defined, in the Strategy, as 'the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises')<sup>48</sup>. This political context explains why the EU has not been able to successfully push initiatives aimed at solving the protracted conflicts in the eastern neighborhood (*see below*)<sup>49</sup>. One key field for cooperation could indeed be efforts at solving 'protracted conflicts'. This issue used to be considered as a possible testing ground for future Russia-EU security cooperation. However, this potential has remained atrophied due to the fact that 'frozen conflicts' have been used by Moscow as one of the vectors aimed at asserting its influence over former Soviet republics that have shown a stronger determination than others to escape Russia's orbit.
- In addition, Russia sees the EU as a kind of a strategic continuation of the United States and NATO, which are associated with the notions of military challenges and hard security problems. The proposed *rapprochement* between the EU and NATO will hardly alter this Russian approach<sup>50</sup>. This perception has been compounded by the fact that EU countries that are also NATO members have repeatedly opposed Russia's critical positions on NATO's policy — saying for example that the antimissile defense system in Europe is *not* directed at Russia, or that NATO's position is strictly defensive and that the Alliance threatens no country<sup>51</sup>; in addition, all EU members that are also NATO members have accepted the need for the Alliance to reassure Central European members of the Alliance in the context of the Ukraine conflict. Russia long hoped that the EU might take on a more serious defense and security role and that there would be a potential to develop defense and security cooperation with it. This was a key goal of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy line during his first term. Moscow considered this a credible prospect at that time because in 1999 the EU adopted its first 'common strategy' (which it devoted to Russia) and seemed determined to instil more dynamism into CSDP after the Saint-Malo summit.

to draw the post-Soviet countries into its integration orbit, to pull them out of the Russia-centric integration orbit. This seriously derailed those Russian efforts to establish the Eurasian Economic Union, which actually resulted in the Ukraine crisis' (Dmitry Suslov, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, quoted in Alexey Khlebnikov, 'What Are the Obstacles for EU–Eurasian Economic Union Cooperation?', [www.russia-direct.org](http://www.russia-direct.org), August 2, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Samuel A. Greene, 'Future Approaches to the US', *Russian Futures 2025*, p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, p.33.

<sup>48</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action, p. 33, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh.

<sup>50</sup> See Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, pp. 19-21; 'Taking EU-NATO Cooperation to a New Level', Joint Op-Ed by President of the European Council Donald Tusk, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_139368.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_139368.htm), December 13, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Press conference by the President of the French Republic, NATO Summit, July 10, 2016 (<http://www.elysee.fr/conferences-de-presse/article/conference-de-presse-du-president-de-la-republique-lors-du-sommet-de-l-otan/>).

Moscow's hope was that over the longer term this might undermine NATO's relevance in Europe<sup>52</sup>. As viewed from Russia, sanctions (mentioned several times in the Security strategy as 'restrictive economic measures') are a symptom of the Europeans' current alignment on the U.S. strategic approaches. The considerable degradation in relations with Germany and France, which used to be Russia's major interlocutors inside the EU, has contributed to this interpretation.

### 3.2 The EU facing assertive Russia

In 2014, Russia had certainly not anticipated that the European Union would prove able to decide and maintain sanctions (just like it probably did not bet on the consensus that NATO managed to achieve on the reinforcement of defence and deterrence mechanisms in the context of the Ukraine conflict). In a situation where EU members' foreign policy interests generally diverge rather than converge, such a show of unity was — and remains — quite remarkable. As suggested in the EU's Global strategy, foreign policy differences amongst member states have been transcended by the fact that 'Russia's violation of international law and the destabilisation of Ukraine, on top of protracted conflicts in the wider Black Sea region, have challenged the European security order at its core'. Frustration with Moscow's behaviour is widely shared in the EU. The very active influence policy that Russia is deploying towards Western countries (Russian media in foreign languages, propaganda<sup>53</sup>, ties to political parties or personalities, cyber...), although its real impact is difficult to measure, has created more mistrust in European capitals. Moscow's strong inclination to rely on military power and intimidation is an essential source of growing distrust on the part of the EU, which is much more reluctant to use these tools, as is well known. Russia's relative resilience<sup>54</sup> in front of sanctions has also nurtured this frustration: while sanctions have certainly hurt the Russian economy, they have not produced a change in attitude on Moscow's part on the Ukraine conflict and a more flexible international behaviour overall (Syria, suspension of plutonium agreement...). Hopes that Russia may become more amenable again out of a need to attract more European investments, technology transfers or industrial partnerships proved short-sighted.

'A consistent and united approach must remain the cornerstone of EU policy towards Russia', the EU's Global strategy stresses<sup>55</sup>. Maintaining unity has been and will continue to be a constant test, since all EU members do not see the 'Russia problem' in the same way. The military challenge that Russia represents is not the subject of an EU consensus. Poland considers Russia as a military threat, and the idea is widespread in this country that a conflict with Moscow involving Poland is a possibility for the future. French President François Hollande declared to the press before the beginning of the July 2016 NATO Warsaw summit that Russia 'is not an adversary, not a threat'<sup>56</sup>. The Italian Ministry of Defence White Paper for International Security and Defense makes no direct mention of Russia, the conflict in Ukraine, Crimea. Rome has made it

<sup>52</sup> See Isabelle Facon, 'Les relations de sécurité entre l'Union européenne et la Russie, une nouvelle donne ?', in Tanguy de Wilde d'Estmael, Laetitia Spetschinsky (ed.), *La politique étrangère de la Russie et l'Europe – Enjeux d'une proximité*, PIE-Peter Lang, 2004, pp. 139-166.

<sup>53</sup> Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department, European Parliament, 'EU Strategic Communications with a View to Counteracting Propaganda', 2016; 'MEPs Sound Alarm on Anti-EU Propaganda from Russia and Islamist Terrorist Groups', European Parliament, November 23, 2016 (<http://m.europarl.europa.eu/EPMobile/en/news/product.htm?reference=20161118IPR51718&l=en>).

<sup>54</sup> Resilience in this case meaning that although the economy has suffered from the sanctions, the Kremlin has not altered its course in Ukraine and sanctions have not impacted the popularity of the Russian president. A poll carried out by the Levada Center in October 2016 found out that 2 in 3 Russians think that Russia should not seek a compromise with the West in the face of sanctions but should ignore them; in addition, 59 % believe that the Russians should disregard Western criticism of their country (Dina Smeltz, Stepan Goncharov, Lily Wojtowicz, 'Levada Center and Chicago Council on Global Affairs about Russian-American Relations', [http://www.levada.ru/en/2016/11/04/levada-center\\_chicago\\_council/](http://www.levada.ru/en/2016/11/04/levada-center_chicago_council/), November 4, 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.elysee.fr/videos/declaration-a-l-arrivee-au-sommet-de-l-otan/>

clear that it wishes to avoid any confrontation or escalation involving NATO. On sanctions, the Nordic, Baltic and Central European countries have been more supportive than some other countries (in several EU member states interest groups and political parties have been advocating the removal of sanctions, and more generally the resumption of cooperative political, economic and security ties with Russia). In the same way, not all EU members have a strong interest in the eastern neighbourhood<sup>57</sup>.

EU members even do not see eye to eye on the kind of dialogue the Union should develop with Moscow. Russia's behaviour in Ukraine has seriously challenged Germany's traditional *Ostpolitik*. However, Berlin still views Moscow as a central actor in European security, albeit a negative one, and has promoted the most extensive dialogue as possible. In other words, despite the collapse of the bilateral partnership in its previous form, the only perceived way to move forward is through negotiation and cooperation. France has advocated both firmness and dialogue in relations with Russia<sup>58</sup>. In Poland and in the Baltic states, which feel particularly vulnerable to Russia's hybrid tactics, dialogue with Russia is all time low and expanding it is considered as basically pointless, even counter-productive<sup>59</sup>.

The dividing lines on all these issues can also be found in the experts' and academic community in EU countries – some saying that Russia's recent attitude points to a basic conflict of interests between Moscow and the West, with values at its core, which means that dialogue is doomed either to fail or to lead Western countries to sacrifice their values and/or the countries in the neighbourhood shared with Russia; others explaining the current situation by a mutual failure to understand the other's vision of the world and of its interests and by political blunders on both sides (not only Russia's).

At the EU level these disagreements have been relatively muted because of the centrality of the principles that Russia's behaviour has challenged (including the inviolability of borders). However, these differences directly affect the ability of the EU to consider in a unified manner the best way to address the 'Russia issue' -- how to tackle the real challenges that it raises (including non-military ones), how to establish cooperation with Moscow when interests concur.

### 3.3 Cooperation prospects: a long road ahead

The European Union does not discard the possibility to pursue 'selective engagement' with Russia 'if and when our interests overlap'<sup>60</sup>. As its 2016 Foreign policy concept stresses, 'the Russian Federation is committed to maintaining intensive and mutually beneficial dialogue with the EU on key items on the foreign policy agenda, as well as further promoting practical cooperation on foreign policy, military and political issues'; it also underlines that Moscow 'is interested in constructive, stable and predictable cooperation with EU countries based on the principles of equality and respect for each other's interests'. Obviously, while the door is not fully closed, both sides express reservations on possible cooperation in their strategic documents. Mutual distrust, disillusionment and frustration certainly do not shape a strategic environment that is conducive to cooperation. Therefore, cooperation prospects appear quite grim and will remain so should the current political circumstances persist in the future. Economic and energy cooperation will continue, although at a reduced pace because of the sanctions and of the economic stagnation on both sides. Therefore economic relations will probably not constitute an engine powerful enough to overcome rapidly the tensions and acrimony that have seriously marred Russia-EU

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Dobbs, Ian Kearns, 'The Strategic Case for EU–Russia Cooperation', *European Leadership Network Policy Brief*, July 2016, pp. 39–40.

<sup>58</sup> The French President declared at the Warsaw NATO summit: 'we must continue dialogue with Russia', which does not exclude firmness — firmness allows for dialogue, and dialogue enables to find solutions (Press conference by the President of the French Republic, NATO Summit, July 10, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> 'In the view of the Polish elite ... Russia's bullying on the international arena proves that any forms of re-engagement and dialogue are not only doomed to fail but also counter-productive, as they are seen by Putin as an invitation to continue his policy of aggression and blackmail' (Piotr Buras, Adam Balcer, 'View from Warsaw: Deterrence Above All', [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu), October 17, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, p. 33.



relations over the past ten years. It cannot be taken for granted that the election of political forces more favourable to improved ties with Moscow, should it occur in the 2017 electoral contests in France and Germany, will have the potential to change this overnight, especially if the result of the adoption of clear-cut pro-Russian policies in these countries or one of them (which, too, is far from granted) is a further weakening of consensus within the EU.

However, even in difficult political contexts, cooperation can take place if sides identify common concerns and interests. The two sides do not seem to see eye to eye on the potential mutual cooperation agenda. The EU Global Strategy proposes, 'in addition to those foreign policy issues on which we currently cooperate', a list of subjects on which 'selective engagement could take place ... including climate, the Arctic, maritime security, education, research and cross-border cooperation. Engagement should also include deeper societal ties through facilitated travel for students, civil society and business'<sup>61</sup>. Russia seems to be interested primarily in a 'harder security' agenda, declaring that '[t]here is potential for Russia and the EU to step up combined efforts to counter terrorism, uncontrolled and illegal migration, as well as organized crime, including human trafficking, illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors, arms and explosives, and cybercrime' (Foreign policy concept).

Many people in a number of EU countries consider that solving a number of global issues requires having Russia on board. However, in recent months, Russia's credibility on some of these issues has declined — at least as viewed from many European capitals. On non-proliferation, Russia has been recognized as a rather constructive player — both on Iran and on North Korea. However, Western countries consider that Russian deeds in Crimea and Donbas stand in sheer contradiction with the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (1994)<sup>62</sup>, thus have weakened the non-proliferation regime. Moscow's recent decision to suspend the U.S.-Russia Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement and to outline conditions for the resumption of this cooperation that are not related to the object of the agreement<sup>63</sup>, it has deteriorated its image as a contributor to non-proliferation. The developments in Syria, where Russia and Western states' visions and interests have not been reconciled<sup>64</sup>, have made anti-terrorist cooperation a more complex endeavour. What is clear is that Russia certainly hopes that over time, some European states will be willing to attenuate the sanctions regime for the sake of developing more extensive cooperation with Russia on this front. In such a context, the EU, for fear of spoiling its consensus on Russia, will continue to find it more comfortable to leave it primarily to member states to pursue ad hoc cooperation with Moscow.

Both sides want the European security architecture to be repaired. The problem is that their strategic documents show that they consider the other to be the one that has contributed to the weakening of this architecture. The EU section on the European security order underscores the EU's perception that Moscow has 'challenged the European security order at its core' and explains by Russia's behaviour the fact that

<sup>61</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> This Memorandum on 'Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons' was signed by presidents Kuchma (Ukraine), Yeltsin (Russia), Clinton (United States) and Prime Minister Major (United Kingdom). The document recognises 'the commitment of Ukraine to eliminate all nuclear weapons from its territory', and underscores the other leaders' 'commitment to Ukraine, in accordance with the principles of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine', 'their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine', their pledge 'to refrain from economic coercion designed to subordinate to their own interest the exercise by Ukraine of the rights inherent in its sovereignty and thus to secure advantages of any kind'. See: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N94/507/64/PDF/N9450764.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>63</sup> Lifting all U.S. sanctions against Russia, compensating Russia for the damage caused by the sanctions, reducing the U.S. military presence on the territory of NATO member states that joined the alliance after 2000...

<sup>64</sup> Russia has repeatedly accused Western states of applying double standards in the fight against terrorism and radicalism; its Security Strategy suggests that they have contributed to the emergence and strengthening of ISIL. These accusations are also implicit in the new Foreign Policy Concept.

'peace and stability in Europe are no longer a given'<sup>65</sup>. As was stressed previously, Russia's own documents disqualify the current order based on NATO and the EU (the migration crisis has shown the 'inconsistency of the regional security system in the Euro-Atlantic region that is based on NATO and the European Union', the Security strategy asserts). While the EU Strategy indicates an intention to foster cooperation with the OSCE, which 'lies at the heart of the European security order', it also says that it 'will step up its contribution to Europe's collective security, working closely with its partners, beginning with NATO'. The Russian Security strategy reiterates, in substance, Russia's demand to a new European security architecture based on legally-binding instruments (point 97), which refers to Russian claims that Western states have always rejected and have less motivation than ever to agree to<sup>66</sup>.

The European Union itself declares that 'Substantial changes in relations between the EU and Russia are premised upon full respect for international law and the principles underpinning the European security order, including the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter' (Global Strategy). More positive interaction will not come easily. As pointed by a European scholar, Russian strategic documents '[set] out Moscow's positions on what are in effect a structural set of disagreements with the Western community, not only in direct relations, but in terms of how the world is seen, from very specific questions to the broader strategic horizon'<sup>67</sup>. And it should not be taken for granted that Russia is currently very much interested in a constructive dialogue (an influential Russian political scientist suggested that time is probably for Russia to stop 'merely getting angry'<sup>68</sup>).

However, the EU may be willing to try and improve the quality of dialogue with Russia for the sake of a more relaxed European security landscape and of the establishment of a political environment that is more conducive to avoid escalation spirals and, over the longer term, to rebuild trust. The European Union has an important role to play in promoting the second engine of the 'double-track Russia strategy'<sup>69</sup> that the West has been pursuing since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis — strengthening defenses on the one hand, pursuing dialogue and cooperative engagement on the other hand. The EU may also want to use such an effort to retain some level of leverage over Russia. In this perspective, the matters that the EU proposes as potential fields for engagement in its Strategy appear as low-key starters, on which Russia might be willing to make overtures without sending the signal — to the domestic public opinion, to its non-Western partners — that it is yielding to European pressure. There have been precedents of Russian cooperation with the West in maritime security. In the Arctic, while Russia has invested in the deployment of new military capabilities, it also pursued a cooperation line that it could extend to the EU to show willing. Cultural and people-to-people contacts and exchanges can only be useful, although the Kremlin has shown a propensity to view that kind of interaction more suspiciously. In more strategic terms, the EU could also consider developing (cautious) interaction with the Eurasian Economic Union.

It goes without saying that this effort must not be unilateral. It remains to be seen whether Russia will be prepared to make the effort; indeed it has tended, in recent months, to basically say to the West that it is expected to take the initiative. At the same time, Russian strategic documents, while they forcefully and systematically criticize the West, also express Moscow's interest in the Euro-Atlantic region, which still

<sup>65</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, p. 33.

<sup>66</sup> See the 'draft of the European Security Treaty' proposed by Dmitry Medvedev in November 2009, confirming many of traditional Russian views and claims on this issue (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152>).

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Monaghan, 'Russia Wants the West to Learn to Agree', [www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org), December 21, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, 'The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place', *Russia in Global Affairs*, May 4, 2016, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/Putins-Foreign-Policy-18133>.

<sup>69</sup> This expression is taken from an article by Wolfgang Ischinger, a former state secretary in the German Foreign Ministry, and since 2008 the chairman of the Munich Security Conference (see 'The Russia Paradox...', see footnote 14).

comes second (after the former Soviet Union) in the list of regional priorities proposed by the Foreign policy concept.

It is premature to tell whether Donald Trump's election has the potential to change the general outlook of Russia–West relations given his stated intention to mend ties with Moscow and his reserved position on NATO and European allies<sup>70</sup>. For the time being, concerns have been expressed in Europe, not only central Europe, that the new president may neglect European security and clinch some kind of a deal with Russia over the heads of Europe and of the former Soviet republics that have tried to escape Russia's embrace. It is also anticipated that in France and, maybe, in Germany the forthcoming elections might bring to power leaders with a more 'pro-Russia' orientation. In such a transformed trans-Atlantic configuration, two main scenarios are possible:

- The collapse of the already fragile EU consensus on Russia, which considers this evolution as an indirect validation of its intimidation policy
- A new context leading to Russia's calming down. This option should not be fully dismissed. As was stressed before, Russia is not completely comfortable with the changing world order as it is not so sure, given its problematic internal situation, of the place it can build for itself in it. This, over the longer term, might facilitate a reconfiguration of its attitude towards the EU.

From this point of view, one sentence in the Russian Foreign policy concept probably deserves attention — 'Russia's strategic priority in its relations with the EU is to establish a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific by harmonizing and aligning interests of European and Eurasian integration processes, which is expected to prevent the emergence of dividing lines on the European continent'. Part of this discourse is not new, especially the mention of the dividing lines in Europe — typical of Moscow's well known speech about its feeling sidelined on the European political and security stage centered around NATO and the EU. The 'Eurasian' dimension refers to the idea of a 'bipolar Europe' (structured around the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union) that Russia has promoted in recent years. The newer thing is the inclusion of the Pacific dimension. This points to Russia's developing – but uncertain – Eurasian partnership with China (UEE–Silk Road). So Europe is still in Russia's mind, but in a much more complex geopolitical setting than in the not so distant past.

Depending on the future global balance of forces, the EU could face very different situations in the evolution of its dialogue with Moscow. Decisive factors will be connected to Russia's attitude, i.e. its ability to tone down its 'heavy metal diplomacy' and to give up its 'take it or leave it' posture in relations with the West<sup>71</sup>; the positioning of the future U.S. administration on both Russia and Europe, which on the eve of Donald Trump's inauguration remains quite unpredictable; the 'Asia factor', in many ways<sup>72</sup>; but also the ability of the EU to develop its competence to think and act strategically – something that has lacked dramatically in the EU's policy making towards the Eastern neighbourhood<sup>73</sup>. This calls, among other things, for the European Union to invest more in expertise on the former Soviet space in order to be better tooled to face the challenges and opportunities that the eastern neighbourhood presents, including the relationship with Russia. The evolution of Russia's relations with its neighbours, at a time when it seems that its inclination to coerce them into Eurasian integration has proved rather counterproductive (which may bring out either efforts towards appeasement or more pressure), should be followed closely. The game

<sup>70</sup> Krishnadev Calamur, 'NATO Shmato?', [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com), July 21, 2016; see Donald Trump's interview with *The Times*, 'Donald Trump: I'll Do a Deal With Britain', January 15, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> 'Heavy Metal Diplomacy: Russia's Political Use...', see footnote 21.

<sup>72</sup> How profoundly will Asian challenges detract Washington's attention from Europe? What will be the balance of failures and successes of Russia's 'rebalance' to Asia, what attention will Moscow devote to this pillar of its foreign policy? What impact will this have on Moscow's European policy, etc.

<sup>73</sup> See Hiski Haukkala, 'A Perfect Storm; Or What Went Wrong and What Went Right for the EU in Ukraine', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 68, no. 4, 2016,

is far from over, its political atmosphere might evolve in the near future in very different directions, and it comprises too many variables for the EU to allow for superficial analysis.

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