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## Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe

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For decades European security was at the core of the transatlantic relationship. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the traditional reluctance of the United States to get involved in the highly competitive European security system gave way to the recognition that it was in the country's national interest to avoid the emergence of an hegemonic power in Europe. The US felt compelled to intervene with massive military, economic, and human resources in two epoch-making world wars resulting from the collapse of the precarious European balance of power.

At the end of the Second World War, the United States made the strategic calculation that the most effective way to prevent the Soviet Union from succeeding where Nazi Germany had failed was for the US to become a long-term European security actor.

During the Cold War the US turned that part of Europe not occupied by Soviet forces into the first line of defense from, as well as pressure on, the communist bloc. Together, the United States and its European partners established or contributed to establishing a multi-layered institutional complex to provide protection for the countries of the North Atlantic (NATO); to reinforce the political cohesion and economic prosperity of the anti-Soviet bloc's European pillar (the Marshall Plan arrangements; the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, OEEC; the European Economic Community, EEC); and to create a platform for dialogue and selective cooperation with the opposite bloc (the Council of Europe and, later, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE, plus a number of bilateral US-Soviet deals in the arms control field).

This intimate connection between European security and the transatlantic relationship remained true also in the aftermath of the dissolution

of the Warsaw Pact. In the 1990s, facing a an international scenario lacking any rival worthy of the name, the US fell back, almost by default, on a conservative attitude informed by the desire to preserve its newly acquired status of sole superpower. It soon became clear that a secure and stable Europe, comprising a plurality of US allies linked one another by common values and a sense of reciprocal belonging, would provide the United States with greater legitimacy and a wider array of political and economic assets to defend its pre-eminent status. Furthermore, if the US were to take seriously the responsibility descending from its 'victory' against the Soviet bloc, taking care of the defeated camp was to be one of its primary concerns.

This is the ultimate reason why the United States could not neglect the Balkan wars of 1991-95 and 1998-99 as merely European stuff. Its intervention, both as military 'pacifier' (along with NATO) and as a political mediator, confirmed that It remained a key European security actor. US pressure to upgrade the institutional set-up of Europe by turning the CSCE into a full-fledged international organization (OSCE), continuing to negotiate with Russia and other former Soviet republics over arms control agreements, and supporting the transformation of the EEC into a political entity, the European Union, should also be understood as evidence that the United States remained committed to Europe. In strategic terms, the most significant step towards ensuring Europe's long-term stability was the dual enlargement of the EU and NATO to countries once under Soviet rule, which the United States supported more enthusiastically than most of its European partners.

In sum, while no longer the central front in an epochal struggle, Europe remained nonetheless high on the US agenda throughout the 1990s, its security and stability lending more credibility to the vision of benign US global leadership. Consequently, the transatlantic relationship maintained its special place in the United States' and European countries' foreign policies.

This situation started to change in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. On the one hand, the United States embarked on a process of adjustment to an international scene characterized by a shift in the economic balance towards once under-performing regions, the rise of new powers, and the emergence of new threats (in particular terrorism and the

spread of weapons of mass destruction), as well as the multiplication of crisis areas that breed those threats. As the US increasingly fixed its eye on regions other than Europe, the transatlantic relationship underwent a process of transformation, in that it relied less on security within Europe and more on problems in the outside world. During George W. Bush Jr.'s presidency, in particular his first term between 2001-2005, the transatlantic relationship was actually downgraded to the willingness of European countries to subscribe to the US foreign policy agenda.

On the other hand, the enlargement of both the EU and NATO seemed to have brought the process of stabilizing Europe to an end, thus relegating Europe to the 'success story' or at least 'job done' list of items. However, since early 2007 the validity of this assessment was put into question by Russia's increasingly tangible dissatisfaction with Europe's post-Cold War political and security outline. During the last years of Vladimir Putin's tenure as president (2000-2008), Russia opposed ever more vehemently a number of US-led initiatives, in particular on European soil (just to mention a few: NATO's planned enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia, Kosovo's independence, Bush's plan to install parts of the US ballistic missile defense system in Eastern Europe). This process culminated in the war waged by Russia against neighboring Georgia in 2008, which was intended as much to rebuild Russia's prestige domestically as to humiliate NATO and force it to re-appreciate Russia as one of Europe's great powers. As clashes with Russia exposed fissures both at the transatlantic and the EU level, it seemed that European security, far from being the glue between the transatlantic partners, had become a bone of contention.

Although the emerging gap between European security and transatlantic cooperation reflects structural changes in both the European and global contexts, there is no irrefutable evidence pointing toward an unstoppable widening of this gap. In fact, since the inauguration of the Barack Obama administration in early 2009, there has been an attempt by the United States and its European partners to rebuild consensus, in particular concerning relations with Russia. Today European security is in a state of flux, and it is still too early to predict how it is going to develop in the mid- to long-term. Nonetheless, it is certainly possible to identify the undercurrents capable of orienting the direction European

security could take. This introduction, and indeed this entire volume, aims at delving deep into such issues.

## EUROPE'S FRACTURED SECURITY SPACE

Europe is a highly institutionalized security complex. No other region counts so many organizations and sub-regional arrangements performing security tasks: NATO; the EU; the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO, the Russian-led group comprising other six former Soviet republics);<sup>1</sup> the OSCE; the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM, a four-strong body committed to promoting security and prosperity around the Black Sea basin);<sup>2</sup> the EU-led Balkans Stabilization and Association Process (SAP). In addition, a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements have been struck as a contribution to the continent's security, such as the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) and US-Russian arms control deals.

Apart from the sheer number of institutions, it is the nature of some of these organizations that makes Europe's security environment peculiar. NATO and CSTO are military alliances bound by a mutual defense clause (accordingly, an attack against one member must be considered an attack against all members)<sup>3</sup> that conduct regular joint military exercises and have set up a rapid reaction force. NATO has also long established an integrated military command. The EU, for its part, is the most integrated organization of the world, combining elements of intergovernmental and supranational governance (although not in the foreign and defense policy field). With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty

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1. CSTO member states are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Founded in 2002, the CSTO is based on the 1992 Treaty of Tashkent.

2. GUAM member states are Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. GUAM was established in 2001.

3. In a way closely reminiscent of the Washington Treaty's Art. V, Art. 4 of the Tashkent Treaty binds all member states to provide assistance, including by military means, to the member state under attack.

a mutual assistance clause, not dissimilar in essence from NATO's Article V on mutual defense, is now valid also for all EU member states.<sup>4</sup>

Such complexity has contributed to reducing significantly, but not to eliminating altogether, the risk of conflict in Europe. And yet it also reflects a fractured security landscape that resembles an ill-conceived puzzle whose pieces do not fit perfectly. In particular where multilateral bodies are weak, or where territorial disputes have been frozen but not settled (as in Moldova and the Caucasus, and potentially in the Balkans and the Crimean peninsula), undercurrents of conflict and tensions remain. This hinges a great deal on the fact that Europe's multiple security actors have different security sensibilities, needs, and priorities. As a consequence, they often pursue diverging agendas.

### *Multiple actors in the western camp: NATO, the US, and the EU*

NATO is still Europe's main security actor. Not only does the alliance comprise the majority of the continent's countries, but also the most advanced in economic and technological terms. More important, NATO also includes non-European members, one of which – the United States – happens to be the world's mightiest military power by far. Mostly with the urging of the United States, NATO has undergone a process of adjustment to the new threat environment in recent years which has led it to embark on military operations far away from the Euro-Atlantic area as well as on security tasks not related to territorial defense. Two examples are the stabilization and counterinsurgency mission in Afghanistan and the antipiracy mission in the Gulf of Aden.

The alliance has not forgotten its European roots, though. As stated in its recently endorsed new strategic concept, territorial defense, to which regular contingency planning and military exercises contribute essentially, remains at its core. So does the commitment to the vision of a 'Europe whole and free,' significantly evoked in relation to the al-

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4. Art. 42(7) of the Treaty on the European Union as amended by the Lisbon Treaty.

liance's open-ended enlargement policy.<sup>5</sup> In other words, NATO apparently sees itself not only as the ultimate guarantor of its members' defense, but also, at least potentially, as the guarantor for peace in Europe as a whole. Clearly, other European countries, namely Russia, do not see exactly eye-to-eye with NATO on this.

One peculiarity of NATO is that, in spite of being a mainly European organization, its most influential member, the United States, is from a distant continent. Many, if not most, European NATO member states actually appreciate the alliance precisely because it keeps the US focused on Europe and, as a corollary, on their security. NATO provides a legitimate framework for US military presence in Europe. The alliance's most senior military officer is simultaneously the head of EUCOM, the US military command for Europe, one of the only two US armed forces headquarters located outside the US territory (more precisely in Stuttgart, Germany).<sup>6</sup> Thousands of US troops are stationed in a number of US bases and other minor facilities spread across Europe. Five European countries also host US nuclear warheads in the framework of special nuclear-sharing arrangements that constitute NATO's nuclear deterrent.

However, the United States' security role in Europe extends beyond NATO's courtyard, encompassing an entire complex of bilateral relationships that vary considerably in nature, purpose, and intensity. While US security cooperation with its largest NATO allies – Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Turkey – focuses primarily on areas other than Europe, European security continues to occupy a slot in their list of activities. For instance, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the US are all members, along with Russia, of the Contact Group for the Balkans, an ad hoc grouping acting as guarantor of regional peace accords' implementation. The US has also developed bilateral military relations with smaller countries, in particular in central and eastern Europe. Although now ab-

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5. Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, adopted by NATO Heads of State and Government on 19-20 November 2010 in Lisbon. See in particular the Preface and sections on 'Core Tasks and Principles,' 'Defence and Deterrence,' and 'Promoting International Security through Cooperation.'

6. The other one, AFRICOM, is also in Europe, and is also near Stuttgart.

orted, Bush's plans to place components of a US-built ballistic missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic attest to the significance of an autonomous – i.e., separate from NATO – US security role in Europe.

Even more telling in this regard is the US's bilateral relationship with Russia. European security seems to a certain extent to be a function of US-Russia relations. Progress, or lack thereof, on NATO-Russia cooperation agenda, for instance, generally follows periods of warmer or cooler relations between Washington and Moscow. In addition, American and Russian officials negotiate nuclear arms reductions – which affect directly Europe's security since Europe is well within the range of those weapons – on a bilateral basis or, as some European pundits bitterly put it, over the heads of the Europeans. More broadly speaking, the attitude towards Russia of some European countries – in particular the eastern ones – is often a by-product of the US's Russia policy. For countries such as Poland or the Baltic states, chastising Russia – as well as other European countries for being soft on Russia – is politically less expedient if the US is bound on a conciliatory course. Specific national concerns *vis-à-vis* Russia are consequently emphasized or de-emphasized according to the attitude prevailing in Washington at a given time.

All this however cannot conceal the simple truth that, presently, Europe no longer catches America's attention as in the 1990s. Today, Washington does not see Europe as a security problem and, to the extent that security problems do persist in the Old Continent, it would want the Europeans to be able to manage them autonomously or with the US playing a supporting role only.<sup>7</sup> This trend has led pundits and commentators to predict a future withdrawal of the United States from Europe and advance the case for a 'trialogue' comprising the three main actors that geopolitics links one another in this offshoot of the Eurasian continental mass: the EU, Russia, and Turkey.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, the diminished importance of Europe for the US should not be made automatically equivalent to a diminished importance of the

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7. See James Goldgeier's chapter in this volume.

8. See Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard (with Dimitar Bechev, Jana Kobzova, and Andrew Wilson), *The Spectre of a Multipolar Europe* 'European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Report', October 2010.

US for Europe. While the two processes are inter-related, postulating their identity carries the risk of taking trends for facts, thereby producing unfounded conclusions. In fact, even a reduced US military presence in Europe would not make the United States less relevant to European security. It might be that US strategic planners are today more ready than ever to 'leave Europe to the Europeans,' but not to the extent of renouncing America's ability to influence developments in Europe according to its interest. NATO's relevance might be destined to fade away as time passes by, but as of now there is no evidence pointing to its actual demise, nor is there any reason to believe that US-Russia relations are set to become a secondary issue. If anything, the contrary seems the case. Thus, the United States is likely to be counted among one of Europe's security players still for many years to come.

The European Union is perhaps Europe's most intriguing security actor, and at the same time the most difficult to grasp. This hinges a great deal on the fact that while the EU does perform security tasks and is developing an autonomous military dimension, it contributes to the continent's security mostly through non-military means. Together with NATO, the EU is the most spectacular example in recent history of the ability of countries for centuries divided by rivalry and conflict to establish an area of peace and stability. Unlike NATO, however, the EU has done so by fostering integration in a number of policy areas as much as promotion of common values and norms. A sign of its success is not only that war among its member states has now come to seem unthinkable, but also that none of them, not even the largest members, think of their role in the European context if not as members of the EU.

The stabilizing impact of the European Union is felt also beyond its borders, most notably in countries with a realistic prospect of becoming members. The EU's eastern enlargement in the 2000s contributed decisively to consolidating the democratic stabilization of the candidate countries. Even more telling is the case of the Western Balkans, where tensions have certainly not remained latent since the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The US was crucial in putting an end to the violence in Bosnia and Kosovo, but it is the prospect of EU membership that constitutes the most powerful incentive to avoid conflict among countries or groups within countries torn by countless mutual recriminations. And even



where the prospect of accession is vague or non-existent, as is the case with Ukraine, Moldova, or Russia, the vicinity of the European Union and the advantages of being engaged with it both in political and economic terms do have a restraining, albeit limited, effect on destabilizing forces. Finally, the EU is perceived in less antagonistic terms than NATO by countries otherwise suspicious of western intentions and actions, notably Russia or (to a lesser extent) Serbia, and this facilitates detente processes (as it became clear during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, when Russia accepted the mediation of France, then holder of the EU presidency). Accordingly, the importance of the Union's political and economic role for Europe's security cannot be exaggerated.

Against this backdrop, the weakness of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), the EU's civilian-military capacity, is a source of frustration and growing delusion for many observers.<sup>9</sup> Not only do standard defense tasks remain outside the CSDP framework, but even crisis management, ostensibly the CSDP's rationale, is mainly performed in post-conflict situations, i.e. when security conditions seem no longer to be as critical as to raise concerns about the possibility of large-scale outbreaks of violence. Even the EU's largest military mission ever, EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (which counted 7,000 troops at its onset in December 2004), was basically a follow-up of a NATO force that had guaranteed against the risk of violence for almost nine years. Furthermore, Althea itself has relied on NATO's planning capacity, in keeping with the 2003 Berlin Plus agreement regulating EU-NATO military cooperation. To a lesser degree, the same process of supervised transfer of responsibility between the two organizations happened between 2001 and 2003 in Macedonia, where an EU military mission replaced a NATO force only once security conditions were judged sufficiently stable. That CSDP, in military terms, is just a supplementary crisis management tool is further attested to by the decision by US and European leaders to maintain NATO control over the security of Kosovo after the latter's declaration of independence from Serbia in early 2008.

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9. Anand Menon's chapter in this volume draws a dark picture of CSDP.

The Lisbon Treaty contains a legal mechanism allowing for the greater military integration of like-minded EU member states, but so far ‘permanent structured cooperation’ (as this complex, if not cumbersome, legal device is called) has remained untested. Tellingly, when faced with the daunting prospect of ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of their military capabilities in times of severe budget constraints, France and Britain, the EU’s largest military powers, opted for a bilateral arrangement.

Striking a more positive tone, some point to the fact that CSDP at least fosters greater integration of European defense markets – which is clearly a *sine qua non* for a credible autonomous defense capacity – while others recall that CSDP has presided over the development of civilian crisis management assets on an unprecedented scale.<sup>10</sup> Such considerations certainly ought to qualify too a severe judgment of CSDP, but the fact remains that the EU’s hard security role in Europe is ways below its potential.

The reason for this is manifold. Defense still retains a sacred aura of national sovereignty, and EU member states tend to safeguard their right to take decisions in this area jealously. Furthermore, apart from Britain and France, European countries have a poor military investment record, and consequently their capabilities are often not up to the task.

More broadly speaking, the European Union’s hard security profile ultimately depends on the existence of NATO. The presence in Europe of an organization in which the mightiest military power on the planet is involved on the basis of a collective defense clause greatly reduces the appeal of turning the EU into a full-fledged defense actor. After all, to do so EU member states would have to devolve a considerably larger amount of money to develop military capabilities that in any case would hardly match the technological standards of US equivalents. In other words, the modesty of the European Union’s hard security role is deeply intertwined with the United States being a prominent security player in Europe.

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10. See, among others, Ettore Greco, Nicoletta Pirozzi and Stefano Silvestri eds., *EU Crisis Management: Institutions and Capabilities in the Making*, IAI Quaderni English Series 19, November 2010 (<http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=1&contentid=618>).

## *Russia's multiple approach*

Viewed from any of countries lying beyond the EU's and NATO's borders, Europe's security and problems related to it seem quite different from what they look like to western eyes. Nowhere is this more true than in Moscow. Russia's vision for Europe's security is distinct from the West's, in particular as far as NATO is concerned. The Kremlin's narrative on European security is imbued with resentment at NATO's subterranean 'grand vision' for Europe, according to which the dream of a Europe finally whole and free could become reality if the perimeter of the alliance were extended to the entire continent. In Russia's eyes, NATO is the bearer of strategic and security interests that contrast with its own, and Moscow retains that differences can only be manageable if its security interests are taken in due account.

Russia boasts its exceptionality with respect to the West also in terms of political values, and insists on its right to follow a distinct path of political development. In fact, Russia's power system, in which the maintenance of elements of western-like democracy seems to be functional to the consolidation of an authoritarian inner-core structure, raises the question of whether Russia's clashes with the West reflect domestic politics rather than geopolitical reality. Undoubtedly, the antagonism towards the West, and in particular the United States, has been brandished by Russian leaders as a useful consensus-gathering political tool. As mentioned previously, former President Putin was especially keen on antagonizing the United States. Nonetheless, describing Russia's position as merely antagonistic would be inaccurate. In the last twenty years, Russia's leaders have proved to be able to articulate their approach to Europe's security according to different patterns. Even though it is hard to trace such patterns back to a unitary, consistent strategic design, the fact that Russia has followed different lines of conduct confirms that its leadership is anything but fixed on an unsophisticated assessment of the problems of Europe's security. The last two years – that is, since Dmitry Medvedev became president (and Putin prime minister) – provide evidence of this.

Russia certainly pursues the revisionist goal of re-framing Europe's security architecture in a manner that more closely reflects its prefe-

rences. The Russian leadership feels that post-Cold War political and security arrangements in Europe have produced no or little benefit for Russia itself. Not everybody in Russia may actually buy the argument that western initiatives such as NATO's eastern enlargement were deliberately aimed at 'encircling' it, but certainly they have been a source of concern for Russia's security and military establishment. Such concerns have been translated into a number of specific political demands that fill Russia's packed *cahiers de doléance*: opposition to NATO's enlargement, to the stabilization of the Balkans in western terms, to the deployment of US military assets in central and eastern European countries, to the transformation of the OSCE into a sort of European human rights and democracy agency, and to the expansion of western influence in the former Soviet space, which Russia considers, in President Medvedev's own words, a sphere of 'privileged interest.'<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Russia's leadership realizes that its revisionist goals cannot be pursued only by antagonizing NATO and the US, and that in many respects a more cooperative approach can bear more fruits than inflammatory rhetoric or the use of coercive means. This kind of strategic calculus has surfaced time and again since the collapse of the USSR, including recently. In part, former President Putin's ever more assertive stance towards the West could be ascribed to his frustration at having gained little or no advantage for Russia from his outspoken support for the US following the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks. Today Russia can reasonably conclude that it has successfully resisted the US-led western initiative it feared the most, notably NATO's enlargement to Ukraine (by way of political influence on the Russia-leaning sections of Ukraine's establishment) and Georgia (by way of arms). The Georgia war, in particular, has demonstrated that Russia does have a comparative advantage with regard to the West, since neither the US nor the EU seem willing to put reversal of Russia's actions in the Caucasus ahead of the pursuit of other priorities to which Moscow's contribution is essential: curbing Iran's nuclear program, reducing nuc-

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11. For a bleak assessment of the prospect for a genuine West-Russia rapprochement, see Arthur Rachwald's chapter in this volume.

lear arms, securing EU energy supplies (a good part of which originates from Russia), just to mention a few. Indeed Moscow's cooperation on these issues is tantamount to a powerful disincentive for the transatlantic partners to bring up again initiatives the Russians oppose.

More generally, one should count on the fact that Russia has its own, strong interest in stabilizing relations with both the EU and the US. Russia cannot afford alienating the EU, with which it engages on a number of fronts, ranging from energy to trade to visa regimes. Recently, Moscow has refrained from exacerbating intra-EU divisions, a tactic it repeatedly resorted to by putting a friendly face on its relations with continental Europe's largest members while treating countries once under Soviet rule with contempt. Similarly, Russia has much to gain from partnering with the United States, not least because Russia shares many of the issues of US concern – Afghanistan's pacification, Iran's opaque nuclear ambitions, Islamist-rooted terrorist networks, drug trafficking, organized crime.<sup>12</sup>

Russia's leaders might therefore have concluded that their revisionist agenda concerning Europe can become a matter of dialogue and negotiation, instead of contention, with the EU and the US. Whether this approach reflects a strategic shift from confrontation to cooperation, or whether Russia's leadership has only become more sophisticated in balancing assertiveness with cooperation, remains an open question. In fact, the latter option fits well in the picture of a Russian security establishment in which short-term opportunism and political pragmatism coexist with the legacy of deeply-rooted anti-western sentiments and a sense of Russian exceptionalism. After all, Russia likes to depict itself as one of the vertices of the world's emerging multipolar structure, and as such aims to both establish equal footing-based relations with other great powers or 'poles' and ensure the widest margin of autonomy to its international action.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Oksana Antonenko's chapter in this volume provides an insightful analysis of Russia's recent 'conversion' to a more cooperative attitude.

13. Arkady Moshes' chapter in this volume generally follows this line of interpretation.

This sense of 'strategic solitude,' as it has been effectively defined,<sup>14</sup> helps explain Russia's oscillating approach towards the West, in particular as far as Europe's political-security system is concerned. Whereas cooperation, even with rivals, on major global issues may well fall into the expected behavior of one of the world's 'poles', Europe's security configuration is instrumental in securing Russia's great power status.

Since the US-championed 'reset' policy was launched two years ago, Moscow has agreed to more incisive action to curb Iran's nuclear program, allowed military supplies to transit its territory and airspace to reach the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, and struck the most significant nuclear arms control treaty with the United States in a generation, New START.

Progress on European issues however has been much more limited. While Russia has welcomed NATO's decision to resume formal relations (interrupted after the Georgia war) and has adopted a wait-and-see approach towards the new US plan for a missile shield in Europe, and while it has agreed to the EU's umpteenth flagship initiative towards Russia – the so-called 'modernization partnership' – it continues to see Europe's security through different lenses. Opposition to NATO enlargement is no weaker than in the past, Kosovo's independence has not been recognized, the OSCE's democracy monitoring role continues to be contested, and arms control arrangements, in particular the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty, which Russia suspended in 2007, remain hostage to the Russia-Western rift over the future of former Soviet republics in East Europe and the Caucasus.

### *Multiple actors, multiple approaches: East Europe and the South Caucasus*

The region extending from NATO/EU borders to Russia is usually described as a gray zone of multiple and complex countries characterized by latent instability. In spite of their huge differences, all states in this

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14. By French international relations scholar Thomas Gomart, "Russia Alone Forever? The Kremlin's Strategic Solitude", *Politique étrangère* special issue, World Policy Conference, 2008, p. 23-33. Quoted in Moshes' chapter.

'land in-between' – in which South Caucasus countries are included by virtue of geopolitics rather than geography – present some common traits. In various forms, they all suffer from structural weaknesses, spanning political instability, frailty of the rule of law, economic volatility, divisions among domestic constituents (often along ethnic lines). Some of them also have unsolved disputes with separatist entities – Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria in Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan – that great powers or neighboring states tend to exploit to their advantage.

According to the conventional wisdom, this region is the theatre of a struggle for influence between Russia on the one hand and the EU and the US/NATO on the other hand. Undoubtedly, EU, US, and Russian interests seem difficult to reconcile here, to the extent that countries in this region are often classified according to their presumed political allegiance along a spectrum whose two ends are the staunchly pro-US Georgia and the Russia-leaning Belarus. Nevertheless, the real picture is much more complex.

To begin with, the struggle for influence is not limited to the EU, the US or Russia. Turkey is at least as important for the countries in the South Caucasus, and is also a regular interlocutor of Ukraine over Black Sea matters; Azerbaijan has established links with neighboring Iran; and in the last few years the governments of Belarus and Moldova have benefited from China's notoriously loose lending policy, attesting to the growing ability of Beijing to play on a global scale.

Furthermore, regional countries have been learning to adapt to their unfriendly environment. The ruling elites of these countries have come to appreciate the merits of an independent – i.e. de-linked from a standing allegiance to one single foreign power – political course, insofar as they see in this a way to preserve their privileges or power position. Depending on the country's domestic power structure and political and economic resources, the nature of such oscillations varies significantly. When it comes to authoritarian regimes, like the Belarusian or the Azeri, it often takes the form of unscrupulous free-riding, including forms of blackmails: an example is Belarus' threat to cut electricity to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad to get lower energy tariffs; another is Azerbaijan's recurrent threat to divert energy exports to Russia, which is a way

to both gain credit in Moscow and get more favorable terms in energy deals with the EU. In other cases, such as Moldova, the ability to perform political acrobatics is a matter of survival for any government in power. In still other instances, the elites have chosen instead to use their unconditional support for a foreign power to aggressively pursue their own goals, thereby gaining greater influence on their patron than the size and importance of their country would allow for. The way tiny Georgia was able to get US President Bush's ear on its request for NATO membership is a good case in point.

At any rate, the end result points in a similar direction: East European and South Caucasian countries cannot only be seen as the passive object of the policies of foreign powers. They are also able, within certain limits, to influence those powers and even to play them off against one another. Neither buffers between, nor standing partners of, the big players, the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus oscillate between free-riders and balancers. They bear therefore no vision of Europe as a single security space.<sup>15</sup>

## EUROPE'S MULTIPOLAR STRUCTURE AND THE US ROLE IN IT

In part, the reason for the inefficacy of Europe's security system to bring peace and long-term stability to all of Europe lies in the system itself. Most of it is a legacy from a bipolar world. The transformation processes that bodies such as NATO or the OSCE have undergone since 1991 have not gone so far as to convince a number of countries on the losing side of the Cold War, most notably Russia, that they are beneficial to them too. The CSTO may not be represented as a new Warsaw Pact, and yet its main rationale is not a vision of a secure Europe (not least

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15. Andrew Wilson, "The Rise of the 'New Titoism'", *Current History*, vol. 109, no. 729, October 2010, pp. 295-300 provides an insightful and provocative analysis of the 'independent' political courses followed by East European and South Caucasian countries, as well as of their role as 'balancers' rather than buffers.



because the CSTO is more Eurasian than European), but rather the attempt by Russia to secure its influence over much of the former Soviet space. In this sense, the creation of the CSTO reflects a 'bloc' logic that closely resembles the Cold War logic.

NATO's credibility is challenged also from within.<sup>16</sup> The alliance's attempts to re-frame its role according to the new threat environment attest to the never-ending, energy-consuming internal negotiation over what threat should be accorded priority – whether, for instance, Russia should be considered as an unfriendly power to provide against (including by enlarging NATO further east) or as a difficult but indispensable partner in tackling threats such as terrorism, WMD proliferation, or regional crises. Besides, several European countries feel uncomfortable with the level of influence on European affairs that NATO grants the United States. After all, NATO is the main reason why Europe's only truly post-Cold War institution, the European Union, under-performs in the security and defense field.

The OSCE is beset by a similar imbalance, in that its members strongly disagree as to what it should or should not do. This lack of internal credibility explains why, in spite of the commendable job the OSCE has done in monitoring democratic progress in Europe, it has been unable to replicate the success of its predecessor, the CSCE. Back in the 1970s, NATO and the Warsaw Pact used the CSCE as an instrument of reciprocal recognition and to advance cooperation on single dossiers, a task that today's OSCE performs only marginally. Currently, the OSCE's role seems to have become to monitor how well some central and eastern European countries align with/uphold western political standards. This role however implies a qualitative difference among its members that not all are ready to tolerate.

No-one in Europe is unaware that this institutional set-up needs a fresh coat of paint. The consensus, however, does not go much farther. Russia, in keeping with its revisionist party role, aims at a new European Security Treaty encompassing all states from the Atlantic to the Urals. The draft treaty posted on President Medvedev's website has however

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16. See Ulrike Guérot's chapter in this volume.

met with little enthusiasm outside Russia. In particular, the fact that the text's wording is crafted so as to give treaty parties a sort of veto power over one another's decisions has raised suspicions about whether Russia's ultimate goal is to advance its claims rather than set shared, Europe-wide goals. While welcoming the proposal as a sign of openness on the part of the Kremlin, the West has de facto buried it by inserting it into the agenda of the OSCE Corfu process, a diplomatic venue where European security issues are discussed but not agreed upon.

At the end of the day, none of the abovementioned difficulties is serious enough to western eyes to warrant calls for a new legal foundation for European security. Europe's outdated institutional complex may be the source of persisting tensions, but it still provides a rock-solid insurance against the threat of major interstate conflict. As such, for most if not all NATO and EU member states it is still better than any other proposed alternatives (e.g. a new European Security Treaty, or a triangle between the EU, Russia, and Turkey).

### *The risks of a multipolar Europe*

In mapping Europe's power constellation, the role of the United States emerges as the single most important variable. Indeed, it is striking to see to what extent the possibility of redrawing Europe's security institutions is made dependent on the US role being preserved, enhanced, or curbed. Revisionist Russia views it as quasi-hegemonic and wants it reined in. Most European NATO member states consider the US role as crucial to their security and consequently want Washington to remain committed to Europe. Countries in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus are often busy figuring out how to use US interests in their region to their benefit. Supporters of a more effective European Union admit that the United States, through NATO, hinders progress towards an enhanced EU security and defense capacity. Inferring from all this that the US presence in Europe is more a divisive than a stabilizing factor contrasts however with the reality of a stable NATO area and with a troubled, but not adversarial, West-Russia relationship.

To say that the United States is a divisive factor in Europe is therefore, at best, inaccurate. However, the US certainly *can* take decisions

resulting in inter-‘polar’ clashes. After all America is one of Europe’s ‘poles,’ which implies by definition that its action impacts the European balance of power. So does, however, action by the other poles, Russia and the European Union. Hence, it is ultimately to the multipolar nature of Europe’s international relations system that the persisting tensions in Europe should be ascribed. The antidote against the risk of such system drifting towards instability is not so much reducing the number of ‘poles,’ as harnessing its inherent destabilizing dynamics. However, the method that is commonly applied in such circumstances – the institutionalization of interstate relations – is hardly applicable in Europe’s case, given the impasse between conservative and revisionist forces.

The differences within the EU and between the EU and the US pale in comparison to West-Russia divergences. Yet, they do matter inasmuch as they offer Russia or other actors from the ‘land in-between’ the chance to exploit transatlantic and intra-EU divisions to their advantage. Georgia’s bid to join NATO or the Bush administration’s plan to install parts of the US missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic are just two examples attesting to this fact. Russian and Georgian leaders’ game was to use the support of one faction inside the western camp to ratchet up pressure on the other faction. For instance, a familiar charge against Germany, France, and the other European countries that opposed both the missile shield and NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia was that they were too prone to accommodate, or even appease, Russia. But the real bone of contention was that these countries and the group led by the United States held different views of European security. France, Germany and other countries in continental Europe were and still are unwilling to turn it into a theatre of confrontation, and are therefore resentful at whatever US initiative leads in that direction. This position contrasted with the Bush administration’s willingness to pursue its objectives in Europe irrespective of the consequences they could have on relations with Russia.

These as well as other similar cases attest to the fact that the transatlantic relationship is affected by ‘polar’ dynamics, in that the US and EU member states (sometimes just a group of them, sometimes all) have distinct security needs and have accordingly developed an independent view of the problems besetting Europe’s security. But diversity of priori-

ties does not necessarily imply an inability to agree on objectives. For instance, after the Obama administration re-formulated the missile shield plan in a way that is both more compatible with NATO's principle of indivisibility of security (in that it would ensure coverage of basically all allied territory) and less controversial for Russia (because it would be mostly ship-based), NATO members agreed to include missile defense in the alliance's core tasks.

Contrary to his predecessor, President Obama seems to have come to terms with the constraints that multipolarity puts on US foreign action. After all, as major challenges keep the United States busy in the Pacific, Afghanistan and the Middle East, there is no point in opening a new front in Europe. Avoiding quarrels with the European Union and defusing tensions with Russia is also the most obvious step to win their cooperation on issues of greater urgency like Iran or Afghanistan. This simple assumption is the red line linking a series of Obama administration's moves on Europe: the reformulation of the missile shield plan, the shelving of NATO's enlargement agenda, the US-Russian New START agreement on the reduction of nuclear warheads.

This course of action reflects the Obama administration's pragmatic conclusion that multipolarity is at work in Europe like in other parts of the world, and this implies restraint and prudence on the part of the US in larger scale than it was deemed necessary in the recent past, especially because the US faces far more pressing issues elsewhere. At any rate, Obama's strategic shift has brought the United States closer to the position of most EU large member states and had a calming effect on some of Europe's flashpoints. If convergence is an equally possible outcome of multipolar dynamics as divergence, Europe's long-term stability is a realistic objective.

### *Transatlantic cohesion as an antidote against a multipolar 'drift'*

To break the impasse between revisionist forces (most notably Russia) and conservative forces (most NATO and EU member states) it is crucial to adopt a mid-term approach orienting the evolution of European security towards the long-term goal of a single European security space cen-

tered on the predictability of the behavior of all parties and where occasional tensions are managed through established mediation mechanisms.<sup>17</sup> This would reduce the distance between Europe's various 'poles' so that the conservative camp does not have to worry about change and revisionist forces feel that their interests are not neglected. If the United States and its European partners manage to turn the largely occasional convergence on European issues reached under the Obama administration into a structural one, they could ground European security onto more stable foundations. They should work within the existing European security arrangements, given the fact that the impasse between 'revisionists' and 'conservatives' makes the option of starting from scratch a non-starter.

The adoption of a mid-term approach implies work on NATO, West-Russia, and European Union levels. At the NATO level, it is of great importance to re-frame the US commitment to Europe so as to establish a structural link between US and European security. One way to do so is to make use of the political potential enshrined in a US-built but NATO-anchored ballistic missile defense capacity in Europe. Contrary to NATO's nuclear deterrent (made up of US sub-strategic nuclear warheads deployed in five NATO members), which has its roots in the past, missile defense is a response to a threat of the future: ballistic proliferation. Evidently, partnering to tackle a danger that might affect both the United States and EU member states in the near future is more likely to infuse a sense of relevance and reciprocal commitment than relying on a cooperation mechanism – NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements – designed to counter a threat that no longer exists.<sup>18</sup> The development of a NATO missile defense capacity could also facilitate the decision on reducing, and eventually relinquishing, NATO's nuclear arsenal, since mis-

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17. For a more detailed analysis of the notion of a single European security space, see Riccardo Alcaro and Emiliano Alessandri, "Engaging Russia: Prospect for a Long-term European Security Compact", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 191-207.

18. Steve Pifer's chapter in this volume illustrates in detail the extent to which NATO's nuclear deterrent is now outdated and calls for a careful management of its eventual obsolescence.

sile defense components deployed in European countries would be an as powerful guarantee of the US commitment to Europe as sub-strategic nuclear warheads.<sup>19</sup>

In the recent past, missile defense has been a major source of tension with Russia. The plan to link it to Russian missile defense capabilities, which has a certain backing in the US and European security establishments (including NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen), could therefore turn an issue of contention into an aggregating factor – in theory at least. The feasibility of this project is highly debated, not least because Russia has not overcome its suspicions about the US missile shield. Opening the prospect of NATO-Russia cooperation on missile defense, therefore, cannot but be a single piece of a broader West-Russia engagement strategy. This would also imply expanding to NATO the US-Russia dialogue on cyber security and the dialogue on Arctic issues between Russia and regional countries such as Norway. An exploratory NATO-CSTO dialogue on security challenges spanning across Eurasia and Europe could pave the way for the establishment of formal contacts between the two organizations.

Far more important is to re-activate substantial talks on arms control, both in the nuclear and conventional fields. Even minimal progress on reducing sub-strategic nuclear arms, like winning Russia's consent to a formal venue where to discuss the issue, would not be an irrelevant achievement, given that such weapons have never been the object of arms control agreements. Number and deployment of conventional forces in Europe are regulated by the now suspended 1991 CFE treaty. To end this situation, which is beneficial to no-one, implies however a painful compromise on the part of NATO countries. Their refusal to ratify the 1999 amended version of the treaty – which re-calibrates troops' ceilings and deployment limits on a national rather than a bloc basis – until Russia withdraws troops from Georgia and Moldova is as morally

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19. Oliver Thranert's chapter in this volume offers a more subtle, and less optimistic, view of the possibility that ballistic missile defense could actually play the political role of NATO's nuclear deterrent. See also Riccardo Alcaro, *Combining Realism with Vision: Options for NATO's New Strategic Concept*, IAI Working Paper 1007 (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, May 2010) (<http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iai1007.pdf>).

understandable as practically untenable. Since they have no ability, or willingness, to reverse Russia's action in the Caucasus, ratification of the amended CFE would at least re-introduce control over Russia's conventional military assets. While ratification would represent a moral setback, its practical net result would be positive.

In the mid-term, the European Union's security role is not destined to change in nature. CSDP is bound to remain a complementary tool in the foreseeable future, and as such is likely to continue to nurture frustration of EU-friendly observers. However, CSDP should be put into perspective. Its importance may well lie in what is paving the way for than in what is going to deliver in the next few years. If future circumstances force the US to significantly reduce its presence in Europe<sup>20</sup>, EU member states could only rely on CSDP to compensate the loss. More critical still is the EU's soft power, which remains a powerful instrument to stabilize relations with Russia and, crucially, with countries in the former Soviet space. By way of a more integrated energy policy (to be achieved through more intra-EU competition, sources diversification, and physical connection of EU member states' energy grids), for instance, the EU would reduce the leverage over its internal affairs of both producing (Russia) and transit countries (Ukraine, Belarus). If the US were to include support for greater EU cohesion in its Europe policy, a healthy balance between transatlantic cohesion and European integration would be re-established.

How to deal with East European and South Caucasian countries remains the most problematic issue, by far. The pause in NATO's enlargement is a short term palliative. The problem may remain latent in the case of Ukraine, which under the current government has adopted a course of political neutrality. But Georgia's NATO ambitions remain intact, and this may well turn out to be a sort of time bomb threatening whatever ongoing West-Russia rapprochement. The fact is that, as long as this area remains an area of competition, latent tensions will persist and the 'frozen' conflicts will most likely remain, at best, frozen. On the

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20. Erik Jones' chapter in this volume puts the US role in Europe into the wider picture of the limits of US global leadership.

other hand, if the West-Russia rapprochement were to progress in a significant way, Europe's 'poles' would be less prone to be played off against one another, although this might imply western acceptance of limiting former Soviet republics' Euro-Atlantic integration.

Thus, inasmuch as this region is where western and Russian interests clash most resoundly, no clear-cut good option is available. But, again, if the US and EU member states coalesce around a vision of a single European security space, and on this basis manage to improve significantly their relations with Russia, one can bet on the reluctance of all parties, Moscow included, to jeopardize the benefits accrued from a more constructive relationship.

If this mid-term approach delivers the expected results, the odds of making Europe a single security space would look less unfavorable than is the case today. In this hypothetical scenario, today's conservative and revisionist forces could eventually find substantial common ground to re-design Europe's security institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Historically, the intimate nexus between transatlantic relations and European security has been the main driving force behind the creation of Europe's multi-dimensional complex of institutions: NATO, the EEC/EU, the CSCE/OSCE, and other security arrangements, in particular in the arms control field.

Undoubtedly, the high level of institutionalization of European security is still a stabilizing factor insofar as it ensures peace within the large chunks of Europe that belong to either NATO or the EU. It also reduces the risk of interstate conflict, as it reflects a 'Europe of the few,' that is, a Europe where only a handful of actors are able to play power politics, and not a 'Europe of the many,' where a number of states more or less equivalent in terms of resources pursue an autonomous foreign policy course, thereby increasing the odds for confrontation.

Europe is emerging as a multipolar region where power is exercised, in different forms, by no more than three 'poles:' Russia, the EU, and the US; and since the EU and the US are able to manage their differences be-



low the threshold of confrontation, inter-‘polar’ clashes take place at the West-Russia level only. But even here, the lessons from the last twenty years are that neither the US nor the EU or Russia are willing to let tensions heat up to the breaking point. Nothing attests to this fact more eloquently than the *détente* course sought by all parties after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war.

Yet this highly institutionalized complex is unable to bring enduring peace and stability to all of Europe. Russia, the EU, and the US may be unwilling to break relations, but they certainly continue to have conflicting priorities, especially concerning the former Soviet space in East Europe and the South Caucasus. Here ‘polar’ relations have allowed for the ‘freezing,’ but not the settlement, of conflicts, and more in general are a brake to longer-term stabilization processes (not least because the regional elites tend to exploit inter-‘polar’ rivalries to their advantage).

There is a widespread perception that Europe’s security complex is in dire need of an upgrade. However revisionist forces (notably Russia) and conservative forces (most NATO member states) have so far been unable to reconcile their divergences. This difficulty is augmented by differences within the western camp.

After a series of clashes during the Bush administration years exposed a transatlantic gap concerning Europe’s security, under the Obama administration the US and the EU seem to have reached again a manageable degree of convergence. However, such convergence is more occasional than structural. To pave the way for Europe’s long-term security, the United States and the European Union should agree upon a policy platform aimed at reinvigorating the US commitment to Europe’s security, improving West-Russia relations, and fostering greater EU cohesion. Taming Europe’s emerging multipolarity is possible upon the condition of a solid transatlantic relationship and a constructive West-Russia partnership. Even if not as central as it used to be, European security can still be a fundamental component of transatlantic relations.