



Georgia and the European Security Architecture Conundrum

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"[...] Europe is indeed a peninsula stuck on the end of Russia. However, given the globalized and globalizing context of contemporary security, Russia is a European power and together we are all ever more a peninsula stuck on the end of Asia. [...] Russia is missing a fundamental strategic point - if Russia wants to fashion a single European security space it needs to promote a new security agenda and soon".¹

The creation of an European security architecture has been a thorny issue since the end of the Cold War. Despite internal and external changes undertaken by European actors, the principal challenge has been the re-approximation of former enemies and the search for a *modus vivendi* to accommodate the existing security institutions with Russia. In the twenty-first century, the debate about Europe's security has gained a new impetus since Russia has reasserted its position externally under Vladimir Putin's leadership. In this context, relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) have become more difficult, namely due to the diverging views concerning the evolution of countries in the so-called 'common neighborhood' and Georgia in particular. The

prospects for cooperation in this area are sensitive, concerning as they do national sovereignty, thus warranting the need for continued efforts in a long-term approach. This paper aims to analyze security and defense relations between major European actors and how Georgia is one of the key elements to understanding the rationales of this difficult area for political convergence. We argue that the European Security Architecture is still politically, and operationally, fragmented because of the political differences between Russia and other main players. We also argue that the lack of common foundations has gained new impetus since 2008, when Moscow and Tbilisi fought a brief war and because the year is also marked by other security moves that imply Georgia.

The Renewed Debate on European Security: Russian Return and Contested Foundations

Recently, Russian initiatives have demonstrated a renewed will to review security relations in Europe. See, for instance, the Conference on 'European Security: military and political approach', held by the Russian Ministry of Defense, on 23-24 May 2013. Moscow managed to gather major security players to discuss what it considers outdated security institutions and new threats. This move comes after the so-called 'Medvedev proposal' that the former Russian President launched in

¹ Julian Lindley-French, "Moscow European Security Conference" (*Lindley-French's Blog Blast: Speaking Truth Unto Power*, 23 May 2012).



June 2008 during a visit to Germany.² Nonetheless, the proposal appeared to be an 'empty shell' that has not yielded significant results. The Medvedev proposal was vague and sometimes inconsistent.³

The core issue in NATO-Russia relations⁴ is cooperation in Europe and Russian opposition to further Eastern enlargements (see below). As far as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is concerned, this organization has failed to provide a post-Cold War security order. It is illustrative that, on the one hand, Andrey Klimov⁵ considers that it is time to organize a major international conference on the issue of security to acknowledge twenty-first century realities (which implicitly refers to the obsolescence of the 1975 Helsinki principles). On the other hand, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, former Secretary-General of NATO, was willing to engage in a dialogue on Medvedev proposal but his starting point for talks was the 'satisfactory' and 'balanced' nature of the existing security architecture.⁶ At bottom, an issue of legitimacy and real sharing of principles hampers the development of relations with Russia. On the contrary, there have been more pressures on European security, namely from Moscow. Today, European security has failed to achieve the principle of 'indivisibility' proclaimed by the Declaration of Lisbon.⁷

Beyond the mere rhetoric, Moscow exhibits a strong will to remake security relations in Europe. This stance is also expressed in the new doctrines that Russia has endorsed to reformulate its Foreign Policy Concept (2008 and 2013), its security strategy (2009) and its military doctrine (2010). Additionally, the Kremlin's claims to 'regions of special interest'⁸ indicates the strategic importance that countries in the post-Soviet space have in the Russian perception of security. This space is also called 'near abroad', including the fourteen Newly Independent States, which, along with the Russian Federation, had comprised the USSR. This zone of vital interest, or at least sphere of influence, is fundamental in the Russian

perception of threats. When President Medvedev used the above-mentioned expression in August 2008, he was implicitly referring to Georgia as a neighboring country. More broadly, one might argue that the rhetorical turning point in Russia's reassertions is the discourse that President Putin delivered at the 'Annual Munich Security Conference' in February 2007.⁹ This speech prefigured the new concepts that form the core Russian foreign policy objectives: multipolar international relations; counterbalancing the United States; and, keeping a relevant position in the 'common neighborhood' with the European Union.¹⁰ Moscow rejects the term 'common neighborhood' and declined a participation in the EU 'European Neighborhood Policy' (ENP) that promotes the idea. A Russian specialist on European integration underlines that for Russia the ENP is unilateral and that the policy does not aim to work with other international organizations.¹¹ Globally, EU post-enlargement ambitions in the common neighborhood are those of a post-modern actor, in contrast with traditional Russian sovereign prerogatives. This observation is based on some elements of Ivan Krastev's definition of European post-modernity: a system of mutual interference in domestic affairs, security based on openness and transparency and the rejection of the use of force to solve conflicts.¹² Instead of becoming an idealized European partner, in the EU perspective Putin's Russia is becoming a challenging foreign policy actor.

According to some analysts, the large-scale military exercise that Moscow conducted in the Caucasus last summer, known as 'Kavkaz-2012', is a direct threat to Georgia and the West.¹³ The exercises coincided with Georgia's parliamentary elections, elections that marked the first peaceful transition of power in Georgia's history with the victory of the opposing coalitions 'Georgian Dream', led by the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili.¹⁴ The perception that Russia will eventually launch a military build-up is suggested by the country's increasing spending in defense. Additionally, military exercises of the summer 2008 create possible comparisons with the

2 President of Russia, "European Security Strategy (unofficial translation)" (President of Russia, Official Web Portal, 2009).

3 For further analysis on the Medvedev proposal for a new European Security Pact, see Sandra Fernandes, "The European Union and the Medvedev Proposal: A Breakthrough or an Empty Shell?", in Roger Kanet and Raquel Freire (eds.), *Russian and European Security* (Dordrecht: Republic of Letters Publishing, 2012), pp. 261-285.

4 NATO-Russia relations are institutionalized, namely through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC).

5 Andrey Klimov, "Speech at Extraordinary Meeting of the European Union-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee" (Brussels, European Parliament, 23 September 2008).

6 Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "Transatlantic Leadership for a New Era" (Address presented at the Security and Defense Agenda, Brussels, Stanhope Hotel, 26 January 2009).

7 OSCE, "Lisbon Document 1996" (1996).

8 Dmitry Medvedev, "Medvedev Sets Out Five Foreign Policy Principles in TV Interview" (*BBC Monitoring*, 31 August 2008 [cited in *Johnson's Russia List*, No. 163, 2008]).

9 On the Munich discourse and the evolution of Putin's Russian foreign policy towards Europe, see Sandra Fernandes, "Putin's Foreign Policy towards Europe: Evolving Trends of an (Un)Avoidable Relationship", in Roger Kanet and Rémi Piet (eds.), *Shifting Priorities in Russia's Foreign and Security Policy* (Ashgate, 2013): forthcoming.

10 Vladimir Putin, "Speech of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir V. Putin at the Munich Conference on Security Policy" (Germany, 10 February 2007).

11 Interview conducted at MGIMO, Moscow (10 October 2007).

12 Ivan Krastev, "Russia vs Europe: the sovereignty wars" (*openDemocracy*, 5 September 2007).

13 Marcel H. Van Herpen, "2012: a new assault on Georgia? The Kavkaz-2012 exercises and Russian war games in the Caucasus" (*Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper*, No. 12/04, July 2012).

14 On the elections in Georgia and the new majority, see: Caucasus Analytical Digest "Parliamentary Elections in Georgia" (*Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 43, October 2012).



2012 situation. Considering that the 2008 operational moves (Kavkaz-2008 and the maneuvers of the special battalion that constructs temporary pipelines) preceded the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, Marcel Van Herpen regards Moscow's moves as a direct threat to Georgia.

Georgia and Inter-related Security Disputes

Since the 2003 Rose Revolution, the Saakashvili government has invested much energy to building a democratic image of Georgia. Tbilisi believes there is a strong link between good governance and integration in Western security institutions. The link has been marketed by Georgia itself and has provoked external scrutiny on good governance. The country's agenda towards integration in NATO (and the EU) has also benefited from the US "Freedom Agenda", especially in the context of the Iraq failure. Then President Bush labeled Georgia a 'beacon of liberty',¹⁵ and, more generally, Tbilisi is seen as a follower of Washington's notion of democratic progress.¹⁶

Simultaneously, this integration path has soured relations with Russia, most clearly evidenced by the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008. Russia's reaction *manu militari* in Georgia revealed the extent to which Moscow was prepared to challenge the post-Cold War order (in which it perceived itself as a weak actor on which the others imposed). For Washington, the Kremlin acted brazenly. Nonetheless, even if the US sharply condemned Moscow, it was a rhetorical exercise. The US remained silent during the summer 2008 crisis (the first active step was taken during an October donors conference for Georgian reconstruction). We argue here that the reaction was temperate because, on global and security issues such as arms control (bilateral nuclear reduction and nuclear proliferation), anti-terrorism or missile defense, the US still needs a balanced relation with Moscow. On its side, the Kremlin has been linking security disputes to each other in order to advance key foreign policy goals, namely as far as Georgia is concerned (opposition of its approximation to Western institutions).

Although Moscow has always been reluctant to accept the predominance of NATO and a diminished security role in Europe (and later opposing as well the role of the EU in the post-soviet space), the first straightforward moves to change this emerged in 2008. Firstly, the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 has reaffirmed Russia's political, security and military prerogatives in its 'near abroad.' Secondly, the NATO enlargement towards Georgia (and Ukraine) was cautiously postponed at the Bucharest summit in April 2008, considering Russian vehement opposition to it (although there was division among member

states on the issue). Since then Georgia is an 'aspirant country' but has neither a Membership Action Plan nor a timetable for full NATO membership.

The issue of further NATO enlargement is, in fact, linked by Russia to other two security issues that have been addressed and opposed by Moscow with some success: the US missile shield and the CFE¹⁷ Treaty. These issues are dealt with in different forums, at bilateral and multilateral levels. The existing security architecture makes it difficult to discuss missile defense outside bilateral US-Russian dialogue.¹⁸ Actually, there are several security dialogues that do not necessarily overlap. Concerning conventional armaments, Russia suspended its participation from the CFE in December 2007, causing concern among signatories. This decision relates to Russian fears of NATO troops standing at its borders. The Russian Federation also relates the CFE treaty to missile defense in Europe in the sense of a strategic disadvantage for Russia. Overall, the suspension reflects willingness to review the provisions of the Treaty itself. The CFE withdrawal is seen as retaliation for US plans to extend missile defenses in European theater.

Finally, Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in early 2008 has brought additional pressure to the security situation. Questioning the uniqueness of Kosovo's case has been fundamental for security dialogue in Europe and for Russian policies towards its neighbors and Western partners. The Russians argue that the Kosovo case provoked events in Georgia in August 2008, thus shifting the onus of responsibility on the EU.¹⁹ For the Kremlin, the recognition of the independence of the two Georgian separatist territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on 26 August, can be interpreted as leverage on Georgia and indirectly on NATO, to avoid undesirable outcomes such as enlargement.

Conclusion

Horst Teltschik, chairman of the Munich Conference on Security Policy, underlines that any NATO enlargement would require a clarification of NATO-Russia relations.²⁰ This can be interpreted in different ways. The Russian stance, so far, highlights that, in contrast to the 1990s, long lasting and recurrent disagreements must take into account Russia's influence. It is also geopolitically significant that Moscow does not accept the idea of a shared neighborhood with the EU. The 'common neighborhood'

17 The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).

18 For a detailed analysis of these inter-related security issues and the institutional framework, see: Fernandes, Sandra Dias, "Time to Reassess the European Security Architecture? The NATO-EU-Russia Security triangle" (EPIN Working Document, No. 22, March 2009).

19 Vladimir Chizov, "Speech at Extraordinary Meeting of the European Union-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee" (Brussels, European Parliament, 23 September 2008).

20 Horst Teltschik, "Russia and the European Neighbourhood" (Study Day of the EPP-ED Group on Russia, Brussels, European Parliament, 15 May 2008).

15 George W. Bush, "Text: Bush's Speech in Georgia" (BBC News, 10 May 2005).

16 Niklas Nilsson, "The October 2012 Elections and the Role of Democracy in Georgia's Foreign Policy" (Occasional UI Papers, No. 14, 2013).



continues to be a political and an operational red line in security relationships.

The idea of a 'security roof' from Vancouver to Vladivostok, promoted by NATO during the last revision of its strategic concept in 2010, faces many hurdles. The foundations of a security order will still have to be shared, despite existing institutional arrangements. Besides the responsibility of Western institutions in engaging with Moscow, and the Kremlin's responsibility in promoting stability along its borders, the new Georgian parliamentary majority also has a role to play in initiating dialogue with Russia. The result of October 2013 presidential elections in Georgia will be instrumental in fomenting a difficult balance between the permanent national interest in integrating NATO (and the EU) and the goal of improving ties with Moscow.

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