

EU Sanctions are the Vanguard in the Fight against Russian Revanchism

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“Russia is part of the problem but is also for sure part of the solution”, said the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy¹ following a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. “Sanctions (...) are an effective tool in a broader strategy”, added Federica Mogherini in an attempt to relativize their importance. As has become traditional, the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 17 November was marked by European divisions at the precise moment when the EU needed to provide a united political and diplomatic response to the renewed escalation of Russian military intervention in Ukraine.

Eight months after the ousting of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Moscow and the continued Russian military presence in eastern Ukraine, the 28 EU member-states are still far from united over the gravity of recent events. In the absence of consensus, the political response has become a nightmare situation where only the lowest common denominator is possible. It is straight-forward to argue, as Mogherini did, that Russia is part of the problem, but it is surely much more controversial to say that Moscow—and Putin in particular—is part of the solution.

It remains too early to comprehend whether the Russian military intervention in Ukraine is a threat to globalization or whether this represents its endgame.² Similarly, this crisis may risk precipitating a new Cold War,³ as Mikhail Gorbachev has suggested.⁴ In any case, it is unquestionable that Russia represents a “real threat to an open, rules-based international system based on the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states”⁵, as the Deputy Secretary General of NATO, Alexander Vershbow, has argued. In other words, it is irrefutable that Crimea’s annexation and Moscow’s military intervention in eastern Ukraine pose the greatest challenge to the liberal order since the end of the Cold War. This challenge is not “the product of ideology and circumstances”,⁶ as it has been described in the past. The current threat is the result of other circumstances and, in particular, of Russian revanchism. Putin considers the collapse of the Soviet Union to have been “the

1 Adrian Croft e Robin Emmott, “EU targets Ukraine separatists but is split on more Russia sanctions” (*Reuters*, 17 November 2014).

* Published also in Portuguese: Paulo Gorjão, “As sanções da UE são a primeira linha no combate ao revanchismo russo” (*IPRIS Comentário*, No. 14, Novembro de 2014).

2 See, among others, Tom Wright, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Puts Globalization at Risk” (*War on the Rocks*, 25 March 2014); and, Mark Leonard, “Clashes with Russia point to globalization’s end” (*Reuters*, 30 July 2014).

3 Philip Stephens, “Gorbachev is wrong about a new cold war” (*Financial Times*, 14 November 2014), p. 9.

4 Bettina Borgfeld, “Gorbachev says world is on brink of new Cold War” (*Reuters*, 8 November 2014).

5 “Deputy Secretary General: Russia’s actions pose ‘real threat’ to rules-based international system” (NATO, 2 September 2014).

6 George F. Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4, July 1947), pp. 566-582.



greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the XX century.⁷ That said, NATO’s enlargement does not explain Putin’s revanchism, the roots of which run deeper.⁸ Indeed, NATO’s enlargement was just as much a response to Russian revanchism, and an attempt to curb it, as a potential cause.⁹ Thus, as if confirming the validity of this diagnosis, it has precisely been within NATO’s periphery, namely in the former Soviet republics—Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine—where this revanchism has been expressed. Naturally, in face of the Russian *fait accompli*, there are no immediate or short-term solutions. In this respect, Mogherini is right to highlight that the EU must move beyond sanctions and devise a broader strategy. That demands patience and resolve, as Philip Stephens has argued. These twin objectives are the fundamental elements of a deterrence capability.¹⁰ In practice, the West has to revive the old concept of deterrence which remains credible in light of its historical record.¹¹ Thus, and it could not be otherwise, NATO has to assume a leading role in the reformulation of conventional mechanisms of deterrence in Europe.¹²

As Henry Kissinger recalls, order—world, international, or regional—has two components: “a set of commonly accepted rules that define the limits of permissible action and a balance of power that enforces restraint where rules break down”.¹³ Russia poses a threat in these two fields. Moscow’s “authoritarian capitalism” constitutes both an alternative and a challenge to the liberal order. They “prefer to dine à la carte. They take what they like and reject what is inconvenient”.¹⁴ Additionally, Putin threatens the current balance of power and is, therefore, a potential driver of instability in Europe.

There is no point in feeding grand illusions. Putin will hardly be part of a solution, less so if there is no motive for him to politically respect his European partners. Considering this, sanctions are more important than would appear at first sight. Beyond their economic impact, sanctions remain important due to the political message they send. In this regard, EU sanctions have the potential resuscitate deterrence and occupy the vanguard in the fight against Russian revanchism.

7 “Putin: Soviet collapse a ‘genuine tragedy’” (*Associated Press*, 25 April 2005).

8 See Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (Vintage, 2009), p. 14; see also Robin Niblett, “The West must not blame itself for Putin’s revanchism” (*CNN*, 12 April 2014).

9 See Svein Melby, “NATO and U.S. Global Security Interests”, in Andrew A. Michta e Paal Sigurd Hilde (eds.), *The Future of NATO: Regional Defense and Global Security* (The University of Michigan Press, 2014), p. 43.

10 Philip Stephens, “Gorbachev is wrong about a new cold war” (*Financial Times*, 14 November 2014), p. 9.

11 Philip Stephens, “Europe needs a cold war lesson in deterrence” (*Financial Times*, 25 July 2014), p. 9.

12 See Henrik Ø. Breitenbauch, “NATO: Conventional Deterrence is the New Black” (*War on the Rocks*, 14 April 2014).

13 Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (Allen Lane, 2014), p. 9.

14 Expression used by Michael Ignatieff, cited in Philip Stephens, “Europe needs a cold war lesson in deterrence” (*Financial Times*, 25 July 2014), p. 9.

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