

## The West and post-Putin Russia: does Russia “leave the West”?\*

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Over the past few years, Russian positions towards the West have become increasingly, almost systematically confrontational. President Putin's Munich speech at the Wehrkunde international conference on global security in February 2007 came as the most symbolic manifestation of this posture. Threatening to withdraw from several arms control and disarmament treaties, Moscow is again flexing its military muscles – with a resumption of strategic bomber patrol flights near Western borders and intimidating declarations about the possibility that Russia could in certain circumstances target missiles on European countries. Pressure also comes in the economic field – with price hikes imposed by the Russian government on several former Soviet republics, producing cut-offs in energy supply to EU members. In addition, the US, NATO and the European Union are strongly criticized by Russian officials for their presumed obsession with exporting democratic values regardless of the possible negative consequences for the security and the sovereignty of others. Welcoming the emergence of new, non-Western powers, Moscow suggests it is prepared to build up some kind of a political or even political-military alliance with countries sharing its belief that Western states and Western-dominated organizations are no longer legitimate in their claim to shape the world political, economic and security affairs. Russia's

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strategic partnership with China, its effort to consolidate the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as well as its new or strengthening friendships with Middle Eastern countries should be seen in this perspective. As a result, there is a consensus between the US and most, if not all, of its European allies, that it has become increasingly tough to deal with the “new Russia”, more assertive, sometimes aggressive, and more solid economically. Another Russiarelated common point between the US and the Europeans is that over the past few years both the European Union’s and the US policies have been interpreted in Moscow as being intrusive, disrespectful of its sovereignty and of its legitimate security concerns and interests, in particular in its immediate neighbourhood. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the US and the Europeans can and should opt for similar answers. This was obvious at the NATO summit in Bucharest, which showed, among other things, that there are serious differences among the Allies over what kind of policies should be pursued to answer the challenges put by Russia. On the eve of the summit, President Bush publicly endorsed conceding Membership Action Plans (MAPs) to Ukraine and Georgia. Earlier, on March 10, in a speech in Berlin in the presence of NATO’s Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that it would be premature to do so – a view that reflected the opinion of several EU and NATO members, having various factors in mind, including the Russia one.

### ***What are the key driving forces behind Russian policy?***

Two days before her Berlin speech, Angela Merkel had met the two Russian presidents – Vladimir Putin and Dmitriy Medvedev – in Moscow. Then she got some clues about the reasons behind Russia’s confrontational stance, and about the possible orientations of Russian foreign policy under the new president. Obviously, the international conjuncture has provided many motives for the dramatic change in Russian stance. Let us remember, indeed, that Vladimir Putin started his eight-year stay in the Kremlin with a policy of rebuilding cooperation with the West, which had been badly hurt by strong differences over NATO’s Allied force operation in the Balkans. Russia has seen Washington’s unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty (which Moscow spent a lot of energy trying to prevent in the 1990s), start the war in Iraq (which it opposed) and become less and less interested in strategic arms control schemes. The EU, for its part, has started developing a more active policy in the neighborhood that it now shares with Russia, and has proved unable to find a consensus over what institutional schemes would fit best the EU-Russia partnership (the Partnership and Cooperation agreement, the fundamental document that encompasses all aspects of the EU-Russia relationship, expired in late 2007 and has not been replaced). Russia also feels aggrieved that it has not received the “compensations” it expected in opting for a moderate reaction to all these events. Among other things, Moscow hoped for a neutral position on the often brutal methods promoted by the Kremlin to restore

the “verticale of power” in Chechnya and elsewhere in the country, recognition by the West of Russia’s special responsibility in the CIS area, industrial cooperation schemes in fields where the Russian industry is backward... Obviously, the “color revolutions” played their part (especially those in Georgia and Ukraine) – at least for President Putin, convinced that they were fomented essentially from outside, these were the last straw in too long a series of political setbacks imposed by the West<sup>1</sup>. The 2004 dual enlargement of the EU and NATO has dramatized Moscow’s visions of its interaction with the West as many Russian officials believe the new members can only have an anti-Russian influence on the two organization’s policies.

These sequence of events took place at a time when Russia was consolidating internally and economically, allowing it to pay its external debts ahead of schedule and to quadruple its defense budget between 2000 and 2007, while in parallel the US, NATO and the EU were in a weakened position – because of the war in Iraq, the Afghanistan campaign and the exhausting “big-bang” enlargements of 2004. So when the US announced its plans for deploying elements of its antimissile system in Poland and the Czech Republic, Moscow decided that the time was ripe to make clear to its Western partners that starting from now, the Russian negotiating position would be much different from what it had been in the previous years. Since the non confrontational approach had not paid off, Moscow’s posture would now be based on a position of force and with the national interest as the prevalent, if not unique motivation.

This posture was comforted by a specific political context, with electoral transitions in both Russia and the United States becoming a major influencing factor in Russia’s devising its policy towards the West. From a Russian domestic point of view, a posture of resisting the West is clearly an asset in appealing to the Russian public opinion, which aspires to get over what Fedor Lukyanov calls the “*loser complex*” it has been living through since the end of the Cold war<sup>2</sup>. The US presidential election is a very important benchmark for Russian diplomats and negotiators, who believe that the longer the negotiations over missile defenses will last, with many issues put consciously in the same “bargaining basket” by Moscow (future of CFE and INF treaties, NATO enlargement, follow-on to the Start-1 treaty...), the bigger the chance will be that things can evolve more favorably for Russian interests in a post-Bush context.

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Krastev rightly stresses the “revolutionary impact on Russia’s foreign policy thinking” that the Orange revolution had (“The Crisis of the Post-Cold War European Order – What To Do About Russia’s Newfound Taste for Confrontation with the West”, *Brussels Forum Papers*, GMF, March 2008, p. 3).

<sup>2</sup> “Results Which It Is Too Early to Evaluate”, *Gazeta.ru*, 10 April 2008 (Russia Johnson List, n° 75, April 14, 2008).

However, Russia's tough attitude towards the West has more profound roots, thus implications. In fact, it echoes a strategic misunderstanding. When Russia became independent in the early 1990s, it wished to join the club of the Western industrialized countries. For Russia, as weak as it was by that time, belonging to this community appeared as the best guarantee of being recognized as a great power. Russian officials made the case that Russia deserved this place, despite the deep and multifaceted crisis it was living through, because Moscow's diplomacy since Gorbachev had greatly contributed to the emergence of the new international order that consolidated the West's predominance in world affairs. Russia wanted to be integrated into the selective group of major world powers in order to be "mechanically" recognized as one of them, and by that time the uncontested ones were Western countries since there was apparently no alternative system of values and policies to theirs.

At the end of the day, it did not work out. Russia was definitely too weak to be integrated on an equal footing into the Western club and to influence its decisions. In addition, Moscow made it clear that despite its ambition to join this "family" it was not prepared to accept significant constraints on pursuing its interests elsewhere – in the post-Soviet space in particular. At the same time, Russia's declared ambition to join the Euro-Atlantic community, whatever the real motives behind this ambition, had more or less consciously led the US and their European allies to expect from Russia that it absorbs their values and agrees to their decisions. Moreover, Western countries tended to discard Russian traditional security concerns (for instance those about NATO's getting closer to its borders), deeming them as obsolete in the new post-Cold war order, while at the same time not conceiving functional mechanisms to build trust and help Russia overcome the inertia in strategic thinking (as illustrated, for instance, by the permanence of the encirclement feeling)<sup>3</sup>. As a result, Russia not only felt that the West refused to deal with it on an equal footing, but also that it wanted to keep it at the periphery of international decision-making processes – something unbearable for a country that has always claimed global power ambitions.

These ambiguities and paradoxes have produced strong frustration on both sides, and mutual suspicion. Hence Moscow claims an independent and sovereign policy, and pursues a diplomacy that is very much focused on trying to weaken the position of its Western partners.

Given the depth of the structural misunderstandings between Russia and the West, it is not obvious that the political transition in Moscow, with a

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<sup>3</sup> Some proposals made by prominent scholars or even officials or ex-officials in the West suggesting that it was necessary to cut Ukraine from Moscow as a guarantee against a "resurgent Russia" or that it would be profitable to cut post-Soviet Russia's territory into several states in order to exclude any risk of reconstitution of a Russian empire probably did not help much Russia in adapting its way of apprehending the rest of the world.

new leader in Kremlin, will bring more than cosmetic changes to Russia's foreign policy. According to President Putin, the West should not expect his successor to make a U-turn in international policy and to pursue a more flexible line with the West<sup>4</sup>. This declaration may imply, as many foreign and Russian observers have concluded, that Vladimir Putin does not intend to effectively leave the political scene and is confident that he will remain influential in foreign policy decision-making<sup>5</sup>. However, it may also mean that Dmitriy Medvedev is on the same line as Vladimir Putin on a number of issues, including foreign affairs. In his recent interview with the Financial Times, he said that "*Russia has pursued and will be pursuing a well-balanced foreign policy, aiming to defend its own interests in a non-confrontational way, so that Russia's positions will contribute towards strengthening world security*"<sup>6</sup>. No change in sight? After all, Dmitriy Medvedev has been working with Putin for more than fifteen years – recently both as his chief of staff and as chairman of the board of Gazprom, a key player in Russian foreign and European policy over the past few years. Given this profile it is hard to believe that he has nothing to do with some of the Kremlin's policies the West has resented most. Dmitriy Medvedev may have criticized the use of the term "sovereign democracy", coined by one of Putin's closest political advisers, and asserted that "*freedom is better than non-freedom*" and "*is the all-important principle of life of any society and any political system*". This may be reassuring. However, he also said that the Russian mass media under Putin have "*turned into a powerful social force*", which is certainly instructive, although quite disputable according to our standards. As a lawyer, he is certainly not hostile to the strengthening of the "verticale of power", the darling of Putin's strategy of consolidating the Russian statehood which has certainly contributed to stabilizing Europe's huge eastern neighbor but has also produced many abuses and setbacks for democracy in Russia. And given his position at Gazprom, it is hardly possible to envision he has had no role to play in Russia's energy policy. In other words, one should not forget that Medvedev has been not only an executant but also most certainly a major inspirer of Putin's line. One should also not exclude the possibility that, based on this proximity of views and goals, Putin and Medvedev, who, according to the latter, are "tied by friendship and by trust", will establish a dual power system (even though many experts discard this hypothesis, because of Russia's tradition of highly centralized and personalized style of power).

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<sup>4</sup> This was said during Angela's Merkel visit to Moscow in early March 2008. Vladimir Putin stressed: "*Medvedev is no less a Russian patriot than me. He will represent Russia's national interests*".

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Putin is to become the Prime Minister when Dmitriy Medvedev is inaugurated on May 7, 2008. Moreover, Putin has just accepted to become the leader of United Russia, the predominant party in the Duma.

<sup>6</sup> Transcript of interview of Dmitriy Medvedev with Lionel Barber, editor of the Financial Times, Neil Buckley, Moscow bureau chief, and Catherine Belton, Moscow correspondent, in the Kremlin, Moscow, on March 21 2008 (published March 24, 2008).

Vladimir Putin has made it clear that Moscow still wants to cooperate with the West but only when there is a coincidence of interests. President Medvedev will probably follow the same line. He may attach greater importance to the question of whether Russia's economic interests are heeded by its partners (his "campaign" was focused on economic issues and economic interaction with the outside world). So we should not expect a decisive change in Russian international posturing in the near future, even though a change of style may come, with forms softened (harsh criticism of the West may no longer be that useful no that Russia has a new president, therefore we may observe a pause in the litany of Kremlin bellicose declarations). The attitude of the public opinion goes probably in the same direction. For many reasons, including intense Kremlin-orchestrated propaganda on the issue over the past fifteen years – believe the West is satisfied only when Russia is weak and obedient. It remains to be seen whether Medvedev, which does not have a KGB background, will prove more "liberal" than Putin, as many expect, and whether his "liberalism" will apply not only to economics but also to politics. This is important, since an improved situation concerning political and media freedoms would of course help put the Russia-Western relations on a more positive track.

### ***Implications for Western policy(ies)***

Russia does not want to "leave the West". Cooperation with the industrialized West is important for Russia's integration into the globalized economy. With 80% of its population and industrial assets located in the European part of its territory, Russia needs to keep a strong "Western component" in its foreign policy. But the new rationale underlying its foreign policy – expecting equal cooperation with the West and respect of its national interests – will endure. The situation in which Russia reconciles itself without grumbling to anything proposed by the West – as it happened in the early 1990s and in the early 2000s – is something of the past. Moscow does no longer search for systematic convergence of views and approaches with its Western partners. The problem is that this rationale, as was said previously, is not based on the perception that Russian national interests do not depend only on relations with the West and that Moscow should devote more attention and efforts to its interaction with other players, in Asia for example. It is based on long-term frustration with the West, as a result of which any difference (and it is unavoidable that there will be some, for example as concerns the future of the post-Soviet space) with Western countries may turn into a major bone of contention, if not a cause for a crisis.

In such a context, one should not entirely discard worst-case scenarios, with Russia's investing more in its non-Western foreign policy agenda equating with ever more energetic efforts to cultivate anti-Western

feelings, even anti-Western political, economic or political-military blocs<sup>7</sup>. The risk of Russia remilitarizing its relations with Europe is probably neither high, nor plausible<sup>8</sup>. However, even if such scenarios are far from being the likeliest ones, the persistence of a tense Russia-West relation is not desirable, as it not only creates useless hurdles, which we really do not need given the global security challenges we are faced with, but also undermines the cooperation potential with a country that could prove a useful partner in dealing with many security issues – terrorism, proliferation of WMD, nuclear safety, etc.

The issue at stake is how to overcome this situation, what is the key to a better integration of Russian interests in our schemes without yielding to Russian blackmail attempts on certain issues. A corollary question for the Allies is whether it is possible and even desirable to harmonize the “Russia policies” of the US and of Europe? The respective strategic perspectives are very different. There are several major “qualitative” differences between the Russia/EU relationship and the Russia/US relationship which make it difficult to synchronize policies – as it was vividly demonstrated at the Bucharest NATO summit.

A first factor is, obviously, history and geography. The post-Soviet space, and especially the newly independent states that have a common border with the enlarged EU, including Russia<sup>9</sup>, does not have the same status in US and EU strategic perspectives. For the United States, the post-Soviet space is a theater, for the European Union, it is a neighborhood. This naturally does not call for the same visions, instruments and solutions. The US policy in the post-Soviet space fluctuates over time, the depth of the interest varies over time and is a function of other, more global interests of the US. The EU needs a long-term, articulate strategy in this same region. The EU’s growing interest in establishing a predictable neighborhood as prescribed in its Security Strategy<sup>10</sup>, thus in being pushier and more systematic in trying to promote stability, has a paradoxical effect. Not only is it a source of tensions with Russia<sup>11</sup>, it also makes partnership with Russia unavoidable (for example, it is hardly possible to envision any

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<sup>7</sup> The SCO had a very low profile in its early stages, however it has now become a factor in international relations. The anti-Western dimension of its activities has slowly but surely intensified over the years, largely as a result of Moscow’s action.

<sup>8</sup> The real situation in the Russian military is one of the reasons. The effort to reform the recruitment system has so far failed to reach the goals set by Putin in the early 2000s, the steady defence budget increases have not enabled the national army to buy a lot of new, modern weaponry, which the defence industry has trouble producing. Also, the Russian government seems to be very cautious not to over-invest in defence to the detriment of other priorities.

<sup>9</sup> The Russia-EU border after the 2004 enlargement is 2,200 km long.

<sup>10</sup> A Secure Europe in a Better World, December 12, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Because of the EU’s insistence for Russia to borrow more from the “European common values”, which does not fit well with Moscow’s new determination to defend sovereignty and independence; because of the EU’s trying to develop a strategy for relations with other CIS neighbors – Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, South Caucasus republics.

solution to the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space without Russia's involvement). Therefore, the Europeans have to be very tactful and articulate in devising their Russia/East policy if they are willing to achieve their strategic goal of maintaining a stable and cooperative neighborhood.

A second difference lays in the fact that the economic armature of the EU/Russia relationship on the one hand, and of the US/Russia relationship on the other hand is substantially different. So far, US/Russia economic interaction remains limited. Russia and the EU, on the contrary, are linked by substantial (even if sometimes conflicting, look at energy issues) economic and trade links, which have cemented the existing historical and cultural ties and are expected to become even more intense in the future. This creates a very concrete fundament that the US-Russia relations have lacked so far. The US attaches great importance to its energy security and is very active in promoting its interests in this field on the world stage. Europe is in the same situation and in this perspective cannot but take into account the fact that Russia will remain the most geographically convenient energy provider, even though a dose of diversification would be most welcome. Energy partnership is a strong bond and should be a stabilizing factor, as it used to be in the Soviet years and until recently, in Russia's relations with Europe. In this perspective, Europe should pursue a partnership based on agreed principles of energy security and reciprocal investments. Russia does no longer rely on Western credits. However, it is well aware that the EU's dependence on Russian energy is in fact energy interdependence: 44% of Europe's gas come from Russia, and 67% of Russian gas exports go to Europe. The networks of Russian energy export pipelines are predominantly turned to European markets, and this will not change overnight. China is certainly not prepared to pay Russian natural gas as expensively as Europe does. Interdependence comes also from the fact that for Moscow, the EU is potentially a major partner of Russian economic modernization, a key goal in the Kremlin's agenda (it is interesting to note that Russia has shown more interest to conform its domestic legislation to some part of the European standards and rulings when these cover economic and commercial issues).

Russia has not abandoned its historic ambition to be in Europe and recognized as a full-fledged participant in the European political and security order<sup>12</sup>. Many of Moscow's recent harsh foreign policy moves have been motivated by the fear that the EU will be even more inclined than the US to expand its principles in its neighbourhood, that it may use its economic impact on Russia to put more pressure on it for political change and that the new, post-enlargement configuration in Europe may lead to its exclusion. In a word by Moscow's realization that the EU is the shaping

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<sup>12</sup> In his Financial Times interview, Dmitriy Medvedev asserted that "Russia is a European country and Russia is absolutely capable of developing together with other states that have chosen [the] democratic path of development" (op. cit.).



factor in Europe. For now this is a source of acute tensions between the EU and Russia. In the longer term perspective, however, it certainly offers the Europeans leverage on Russian policy.

Commenting opposition of Angela Merkel and other European leaders to granting MAPs to Ukraine and Georgia, some experts went as far as wondering whether NATO was not “*facing a Russian veto through Franco-German hands*”<sup>13</sup>. However, president Bush did not fail to win over a consensus of NATO members only because of France and Germany – Italy, Hungary and the Benelux countries also opposed the US president’s position on Ukraine and Georgia. These are not alone within the EU to believe that a participative Russia is better for European security than a Russia that is marginalized in European affairs<sup>14</sup>. These same countries have subscribed to a final NATO declaration that approves of Ukraine and Georgia having a future in NATO, which demonstrates respect for the choice of their elected governments. They also not opposed acceptance by NATO of the US antimissile plans in Europe, even though Russia has loudly expressed its opposition to these. The meaning of these European countries’ rejecting MAPs for Kyiv and Tbilisi in the current circumstances was simply that sending such a strong signal while the two countries are not ready<sup>15</sup> would have convinced Russia that it was a “voluntarist”, politically-motivated move.

Reacting to the failure to get a consensus over the MAP issue, some experts (in the US, in Central Europe, in Ukraine) have accused France, Germany and other European countries of being motivated mainly by economic interests<sup>16</sup>. Others have gone as far as to suggest that France and Germany

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<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Socor, “Is NATO Facing a Russian Veto Through Franco-German Hands?”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5, n° 53, 20 March 2008.

<sup>14</sup> That is why, for example, several NATO members, including Germany and France, were strong supporters of establishing a special body to discuss European security issues with Russia at the same time as starting NATO’s enlargement (NATO-Russia Joint Permanent Council).

<sup>15</sup> The Ukrainian population does not support NATO integration for their country. The fear of creating tensions with Russia is a major reason for that but anti-NATO feelings dating back from the Cold War are still alive in this country and it would be dangerous to ignore this. Both Georgia and Ukraine are unstable politically. It is, finally, only legitimate for NATO not to integrate countries that are still confronted with separatist conflicts. But this argument is probably the most controversial, given the deliberate actions on the part of Russia to cultivate these conflicts.

<sup>16</sup> It is impossible to accuse the German Chancellor of excessive indulgence towards Putin’s Russia. Under Merkel, Russian-German relations are no longer the “love story” they used to be, with Mrs. Merkel openly criticizing many developments in Russia. Their dialogue has often been confrontational. And during her visit to Moscow on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, she told Medvedev and Putin that Russia would not be allowed a veto over NATO membership. As concerns the sensitive energy issue, one should remember that in October 2006 Putin proposed Merkel the establishment of a strategic energy partnership that would guarantee the delivery of gas supplies to Germany in exchange for Russian access to German energy distribution networks. This was clearly a way for Russia to

are not active enough in promoting democracy. Maybe they simply have another vision of how to promote it. Like the US, the EU considers the lack of democracy as a source of insecurity and instability. But many of EU countries' officials also believe that attempts at "exporting" democracy forcefully can have destabilizing consequences – as is most vividly demonstrated in Iraq and Afghanistan and the "Greater Middle East" at large. Sometimes such attempts cause counter-productive effects. Russia, China and Central Asian authoritarian regimes have serious differences among them but their relationship has been clearly cemented, within the SCO, by their perception that outside players are prepared to organize "regime changes" on their territory or in their vicinity. Also, France and Germany are certainly not alone in believing that fuelling Russia's traditional siege mentality certainly does not encourage Russia's evolution towards our "common values", as this mentality is a powerful tool for the Russian *élite* to preserve itself and justify its abusive power.

In other words, it is a responsibility of the European governments that have to guarantee the security of their population to build trust with all the neighbors. For this reason, though it is most important to display solidarity for all EU members, it is no less important for European countries to balance some of the new members' influence on the EU's Russia policy when this influence is dictated by emotions connected to memories of Russian domination, as bitter and legitimate as they may be. This does not mean that tradeoffs should be accepted and that red lines should not be set, for example as concerns the respect of sovereignty and independence of all EU members and of the former Soviet republics, or any attempt by Russia to continue its coercive policy towards some of its neighbors. But in no case should we push Russia into a corner.

In dealing with Russia the US and the Europeans work from very different strategic perspectives. This limits the scope for harmonizing policies – even though common purposes are certainly shared. Paradoxically, the EU may have more levers than the US to give certain impulses to Russian policy while defending its principles. Whether the EU will manage to harmonize its multitude of Russia policies, both at the interstate and intra-state levels, is another question<sup>17</sup>.

### ***Perspectives***

Many observers insist that energy-dependent Russia is doomed to face an economic crunch which will erase its new boldness in foreign policy. This

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circumvent the European Energy Charter. Merkel declined the offer and urged Russia to ratify the Charter.

<sup>17</sup> The assertion by a senior US administration official that, during the first dinner meeting during the NATO summit, the discussion "was mostly among Europeans" probably reflects this reality (Steven Erlanger, Steven Lee Myers, "NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine", *The New York Times*, 3 April 2008).

approach is probably short-sighted in two ways. First, the Russian government may not have gone far enough in modernizing its economy and diversifying its industrial tool, but it has been quite good at managing the resources derived from hydrocarbon exports, building up financial “cushions” to protect the Russian economy from external shocks. Secondly, the Europeans would certainly not benefit from a new crisis that would destabilize Russia. However, both European and Russian leaders are well aware that Russia is still faced with enormous problems (rising inflation, decaying infrastructure, demographic decline, obsolescence of a major part of the industrial production tool, blatant regional differences, corruption in institutions...). This should be a cause for restraint in the conduct of Russian foreign policy, and gives the West margins for maneuver to establish a more harmonious relationship with this country. Russia wants to participate in and influence global politics, not, as some prominent scholars say, to attain global preeminence and a superpower status again, which is out of its reach anyway.

The West has to recognize that many of Russia’s favorite slogans concerning the world order have some resonance in many other countries, including some EU countries. These are the risks attached to marginalization of the UNSC; the theme of the detrimental trend towards remilitarization of international relations; the importance of cultural relativism and of inter-civilizational dialogue; protection of state sovereignty against external interference; the idea that the United States cannot expect to determine the way in which the international system operates... Many countries share Putin’s views, expressed once more during a press conference after the NATO-Russia Council meeting in April 2008 that today’s security threats cannot be dealt with in isolation and require concerted action by all strategic players.

To say the least, Russia has not been competent in presenting its view in an attractive way. As was stressed recently by the chairman of the International Affairs committee of the Federation Council, Russia is definitely “*in need of soft power*”<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, the West has often tended to reject its offers and ideas for cooperation to jointly face the global challenges without even studying them. From this point of view, the idea of a global missile shield involving the US, Europe and Russia envisioned during the last Bush-Putin meeting in Sochi may prove a step in the right direction, but it will take a long time before the required level of trust for such a project can be found.

Russia has not helped to make its offers more convincing. The increasingly emotional, even intimidating tone of its diplomacy has made the whole picture more confused than ever, serving only to comfort the entrenched concerns of the countries that share a black history with Moscow. Russia does not do much in terms of international security (it does not contribute

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<sup>18</sup> « Need for Soft Power », *Moscow Times*, April 10, 2008.

much to the UN budget, it does not participate much in international peacekeeping operations – much less than Ukraine, for instance<sup>19</sup>). On the contrary, Moscow has more often than not appeared as a spoiler or a complicating factor in security matters than as a security provider. Russia's eternal ambiguous stance about the specificity of its geographical position between the West and the East, leading it to claim full-fledged integration into the Euro-Atlantic economic and security space while not accepting the constraints that go with such integration, weakens its speech on the indivisibility and universality of security, which from the theoretical viewpoint has at least the merits of going against bloc logics, which we certainly do not need in today's security context.

However, some of Russia's claims emphasize an issue that goes far beyond the "Russia problem": the West has probably not been very efficient in finding a mechanism for integrating rising great powers, and often appears defensive, or, alternatively, excessively pushy in trying to export its model.

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<sup>19</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski stresses Russia's "*weakness in the versatile non-strategic dimensions of military power, leaving [it] with the capacity only to engage in mutual self-destruction with the United States but with limited means for the politically effective projection of military power*" (see "Putin's Choice", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 31, n° 2, Spring 2008, p. 111). Russia's decision to contribute to the EU Chad mission may be good news from this perspective.