Reinhard Krumm
March 2018

Multipolar or Multilateral?

A choice of models for the security order 2.0:
Congress of Vienna, Yalta, Helsinki

Reinhard Krumm

Multipolar or Multilateral?
A choice of models for the security order 2.0: Congress of Vienna, Yalta, Helsinki

» **The European security order is incomplete**
Europe's hopes to achieve sustainable peace after the end of the Cold War were not realised. It is true that the separation lines across the continent were gradually removed, however, not completely. European separation can still be observed eastwards, as is illustrated by the armed conflict in Ukraine with Russian participation.

» **The recourse to the history is not helping**
Looking back at orders that have helped to establish peace in the past has become somewhat fashionable in the expert community and among politicians. It is indeed helpful, if the aim is to analyse the situation and to draw comparisons, however, this is not sufficient if the objective is to make peace in turbulent times. The multitude of states and the resulting complexity of interests require new ways.

» **The aim is a rule-based peace order**
Whatever the form of the European peace order might be, it should be based on the agreed upon rules and on binding international law, not on the power of the strongest. This is what the EU stands for: a multilateral approach, not a multipolar one.

» **OSCE as an opportunity**
The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has ambitious plans under its new Secretary General Thomas Greminger. The leading Swiss diplomat has the special success of the "Structured Dialogue" on his record, an instrument that should lead to the revival of conventional arms control.

»Brazen Assault«

Desperation shimmers through the headlines. The weekly newspaper Die Zeit selects a dramatic heading "Nothing is safe anymore". Eugene Rumer, the former member of staff at the US National Intelligence Council and currently Head of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington D.C., is vocal in calling his book "Cold War - Twenty-First-Century Style". In other words, the end of the European separation, as proclaimed after the reunification of Germany, was announced too early. After twenty-five years of a relatively successful détente, the European security order is facing a crucial test again. The outcome remains yet unclear. In his most recent survey, German scholar Hanns W. Maull writes about the breaking point of the international order, raising the question "Dissolution or Replacement?"

In the past few years and especially in 2017, the enemies of the previous security order and its destroying forces have been named more overtly than ever before. The new National Security Strategy of the US has stressed Chinese and Russian policies as particularly difficult for the US, because they "challenge America's power, influence and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity". The former US Vice President, Joseph R. Biden, wrote in his Foreign Affairs article that the Russian government is "brazenly assaulting the foundations of Western democracies around the world". Bruno Kahl, Head of the German Federal Intelligence Service, has publicly announced that "today, we face a potential threat in Russia".

In contrast, the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation from 31 December 2015 concludes that NATO with its "violation of the norms of international law" and the "expansion of the alliance and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders" poses "a threat to national security". And the Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation from 30 November 2016 reads: "The containment policy adopted by the United States and its allies against Russia, and political, economic, information and other pressures Russia is facing from them undermine regional and global stability, are detrimental to the long-term interests of all sides..."

Statements like these alone make it hardly possible to imagine an existing common European security order in the near future - for such an order would have three primary tasks, namely, the prevention of conflicts, ideally more through mediation than armament, the acceptance of the interests of others, and the assertion of mutual interests. Here the desired outcome would be stability and peace built upon the bedrock of an order rooted in rules and international law, which would also be recognized by the larger states in order to protect the smaller ones.

This multilateral approach stands in contrast to multipolarity which is based on the right of the strongest. Yet despite the globalisation and existing interdependencies between states, in 2017 major powers continue to claim the dominant role and accordingly to demand influence, even beyond the limitations of international law.

From the nineteenth century on, it was precisely those nations with strong military and economic power who guaranteed the implementation of security policy orders at the point of their determination and took advantage of this fact. It can be illustrated by events that took place after two separate major wars. Once after the Napoleonic wars, certified by the final act of the Congress of Vienna in June 1815 – and again at the meeting of the three nations, namely Great Britain, Soviet Union and United States, who defeated Germany in World War II and who settled the distribution of power in Europe prior to the end of the war at the Yalta Conference in February 1945.

The proceedings of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) that came to their first conclusion with the Helsinki Final Act in August 1975, introduced a noticeable development in Europe, which reached its climax with the Charter of Paris for a New Europe in November 1990.

Here European security ceased to be understood as the right of the strongest and began to be seen as a collective security rooted in international law and based on values. It also allowed smaller states, which are mostly economically weaker, to benefit from the stability created by a rule-governed security order.

»Security is not to be strengthened at the expense of others«

However, the collective security approach in the mutual CSCE space, later OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), which was once again confirmed in the Charter for European Security in Istanbul in November 1999, did not prevail in the following years. Admittedly, member states have agreed to build their relations "in conformity with the concept of common and comprehensive security, guided by equal partnership, solidarity and transparency".

One contradiction, however, remained in place. Firstly, the second sentence of Section III, Paragraph 8 of the Istanbul Charter states: "We reaffirm the inherent right of each and every participating State to be free to choose or change its security arrangements, including treaties of alliance, as they evolve". Yet the fifth sentence of the same paragraph reads: "Each participating State will respect the rights of all others in these regards. They will not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States".

Russia refers to the fifth sentence when accusing the West of having disrespected their interests through NATO expansion eastwards. Meanwhile, the US and the EU point at the second sentence, namely the freedom of each state to choose their alliance. This contradiction does not appear resolvable at the moment, especially bearing in mind the fact that the negative perception of each other has manifested itself to such a degree that a simple switch over to a collective cooperation is impossible. Currently, the Nash equilibrium prevails, named after the US mathematician John Nash and developed in game theory: two alienated actors, each of whom knows the strategy of the opponent, have no reason to change their own strategy. In the case of an adjustment to their own strategy, there would be no guarantee that the opponent would adjust theirs accordingly, therefore posing a threat to their own position.

The state of the European security order has dramatically deteriorated. This has happened through the Georgian-Russian war (2008) and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia as well as the conflict in and around Ukraine (since 2014). For over three years,

Ukrainian separatists supported by Russia have been fighting Ukrainian armed forces in the South-East of Ukraine. Over ten thousand people have lost their lives; nearly two million people have had to flee. As a result, both the EU and US have imposed sanctions on Russia; in return, Russia has also initiated sanctions against the West. The way towards a peaceful resolution strongly depends on the comprehensive implementation of Minsk II agreements.

Currently, the »New European security order« is a good in short supply

Whilst looking for solutions, the preferred approach that often leads to success is a classical triad of two radical solutions and one offering some middle ground. Following this logic, in such a complex situation regarding security policy the three approaches could be as follows:

(a) Managing the crisis and waiting for better times;
(b) Small steps as confidence-building measures towards an insular cooperation;
(c) Developing new European security architecture in the form of a binding treaty under international law.

In 2017, the expert community and politicians, as well as representatives of civil society predominantly shared the opinion that in the short to medium term perspective, it would not be possible to achieve more than merely managing the crisis. Everything beyond that would require the fundamental prerequisite of fulfilling Minsk II agreements. Yet next to nothing has been implemented by the conflicting parties under these agreements, with their focus being not on the military dimension, but rather on providing orientation for a future normalisation process. It is true that there are new suggestions, like the Russian initiative to introduce a UN mission to protect the operation of the OSCE monitoring mission on the contact line between Ukraine and the territories under separatist control. US Special Representative for Ukraine Kurt Volker, who was appointed in July, expressed support of that initiative. However, the aims of the mission should be different in his view: the armed UN mission should be supervising both the removal of heavy arms and the control of the Russian-Ukrainian border.

Another initiative, which is not directly linked to the conflict in Eastern Europe and determination of a European security order, is the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), launched by the EU. It aims at creating a framework for cooperation between EU member states in the fields of military coordination and development with the objective of fostering the European Union's defence ability.

Due to the unsatisfactory status quo and large steps being an unrealistic prospect, during German and Austrian OSCE chairmanship periods (2016 and 2017 respectively) small confidence-building steps were implemented. It was the "Structured Dialogue" that attempted to assess the different perceptions of the previous twenty-five years on the one hand and to analyse the military powers at the border between East and West on the other – with the aim of addressing the daring subject of conventional disarmament.

Whereas during the Cold War such confidence-building measures were restricted to the first "basket" of the CSCE, namely the political and military dimension, in the past two years both chairing countries have also focused on the second "basket", the economic and environmental dimension. This approach can be summarized under the label of connectivity in the OSCE area. It means increasing connectivity between states in order to bring national economies closer together, allowing for the intensification of cross-border movement and thus making products and services cheaper. After all, according to Sebastian Kurz, then the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria, the Austrian OSCE chairmanship would be about building bridges and dialogue.

However, both approaches, namely the management of the crisis and the small steps towards an insular cooperation, promise only long-term success, if any success at all. At the same time, with very turbulent times ahead the world requires more cooperation. This is why the voices demanding a masterstroke of a new European security order become more audible. Especially after the inauguration of the new American president, an initiative for a Big Deal between the US and Russia appeared possible, at least to the Kremlin. In this context, the expert community have been considering whether the second generation of three historical orders might be possible, focusing on the

Congress of Vienna (1815), Yalta Conference (1945), and Helsinki Final Act (1975). Yet there have been no suggestions for an entirely new item under the label of the European security order; it appears to be a good in short supply in the international showcase of ideas.

Returning to the multipolar orders of Vienna and Yalta

The return to a European security order, which would be based on the results of Yalta Conference, is not being brought forward officially. The consequence of the meeting that took place in February 1945 in Crimea was the division of Europe; this reflected the bipolar power distribution in Europe existing at that time between Soviet Union and the United States. This resulted in the long-term Soviet occupation of Baltic states and also in the direct Soviet influence over the Central European states of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

At the same time – from the Russian point of view in particular – Yalta stands for securing Soviet demands for power and shaping the European continent. Yalta also stands for an unusually long peace period in Europe when Soviet security interests were recognised by the West. So it is only logical that Sergey Naryshkin, addressing the seventieth anniversary of the Yalta Conference in his then position as the speaker of the Russian Parliament, praised its results, as they supposedly secured peace in Europe and prevented World War III.

The outcome of the Congress of Vienna and the Concert of Europe provides another example of securing long-term peace in Europe. The geopolitical lines of thought, however, eagerly overlook the fact that with the Congress, the restoration negating the achievements of the French Revolution began. They also overlook the failure of major powers to reverse previous partitions of Poland. Nevertheless, both Vyacheslav Nikonov, Head of the Committee for Education and Science at the Russian Parliament, and the authors of the report by the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) argue in favour of a new Concert of Powers. Mr Nikonov supports a concert that would be global in nature, while the PRIF report argues for a twenty-first century concert.

In both papers, authors look beyond Europe and the United States and include China. Both papers have a common approach in seeing the larger states as those who will define the security in the twenty-first century. According to the PRIF report, "peaceful management of great power relations" is a priority. For Vyacheslav Nikonov, who is a politician, a Second Concert post 1815 would not be directed against states, but against international terrorism. He argues that it can be overcome only through mutual efforts. Although major powers – and Russia is to be counted among them – often differ in their opinions, no single state opposes the Western model of globalisation, least of all Russia. A set of common rules is not a necessity; after all, there were none present in the century.

Such mind games can appear stimulating. However, from today's point of view an update of political order, following the example of Vienna at the beginning of the nineteenth century or the one of Yalta in the middle of the twentieth century, is not realistic. On the one hand, Russia does not possess the weight of the Tsarist empire or the Soviet Union, neither in political nor in economic terms. On the other hand, Central and Eastern European states as well as the former Soviet republics have other ideas for their political development. They are sovereign states and, in part, member states of the European Union, Eurasian Economic Union, NATO, and of the OSCE. The multipolar or bipolar security in Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ended with the Charter of Paris in 1990 and was transformed into a multilateral security.

The CSCE process for the multilateral security in Europe

The roots of such transformation lie predominantly in the increasingly weakening Soviet Union of the 1980s, whose collapse allowed the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to gain independence. However, this course of events would not have been possible without the German Ostpolitik and the CSCE process with their aim to peacefully dismantle alienation and rivalry between East and West. Beyond this, security was considered in three different dimensions, namely the political and military, economic and environmental and humanitarian dimensions. In the Helsinki Final Act of August 1975, thirty-five CSCE countries declared that

they were ready to recognise that "all participating States have equal rights and duties", to refrain "from the threat or use of force", and that they shall "settle all disputes among them by peaceful means".

History from the Cold War period shows that the CSCE process faced hard tests, including the invasion of Soviet troops in Afghanistan (1979), the NATO double-track decision (1979), the introduction of martial law in Poland as a result of Soviet pressure (1981), the downing of a Korean civil aircraft by the Soviet Union (1983), and a NATO military exercise that nearly led to a nuclear war (1983). The journey from 1975 to the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989/1990 was not always smooth. However, the CSCE process facilitated the dialogue with the Eastern block and shifted the focus on Europe from one that had been dominated by US policies regarding the Soviet Union. Europe has become an important actor, which resulted in the Charter of Paris for a new Europe.

Today, such dialogue has to be revived with a political aim. The results from the Panel of Eminent Persons, implemented within the OSCE initiative and suggesting a summit on the issues of European security policy at the end of 2015, are to be seen in this context. The idea of a summit was taken by Belarus, a small state participating both in the Eurasian Economic Union and the EU Eastern Partnership programme. After its capital Minsk became the place of negotiations on putting an end to the military activities in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the Belarusian government wanted to start a peace initiative following the example of the CSCE process.

The revival of the CSCE dialogue process does not currently have very many chances of success, leaving aside the fact that Belarus is not neutral and beyond this is a state under authoritarian rule. There is no state – including Russia – that would officially declare the Helsinki Final Act as obsolete; besides, it was reaffirmed on numerous occasions in the form of the Charter of Paris and the Charter for European Security in 1999. At the same time, Moscow is interested in reforming the act, unlike the US and EU states. However, since OSCE requires a unanimous consent in all its decisions, such advances are doomed. This happened to the Russian initiative, put forward by its former President Dmitry Medvedev in 2009. It failed to make its way through the OSCE Corfu process.

Determination to secure dialogue even in difficult times

The formats of the Congress of Vienna, Yalta Conference and CSCE process cannot be transferred to the current situation. This is mostly because the interest areas and power distribution between the states involved are in a state of continuous change. Major powers are oscillating between multipolarity and multilaterality. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the multilateral approach, favoured by the EU, has difficulties in standing against states like the US and Russia.

In order to secure positive achievements, new approaches are needed. This goes well with the idea of Willy Brandt, which he presented whilst addressing the Socialist International in Berlin about quarter of a century ago, when European security policies were in calmer waters. He demanded that the audience be mindful of their own strength and "of the fact each era wants its own answers, and you have to be up to its speed in order to be able to do good".

It does not mean, however, that time-tested political principles cannot be taken into consideration. At the ministerial meeting concluding the Austrian OSCE chairmanship in December 2017, the new Secretary General, Swiss diplomat Thomas Greminger stressed that "security begins with trust – and trust begins with dialogue".

This lead was taken by the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs Angelino Alfano, who will take on the Italian OSCE chairmanship in 2018. He has promised to revive "the spirit of Helsinki" – not by turning to the past, but by demonstrating anew the same determination that "secured the dialogue even in the toughest years of the Cold War". These words provide a minimum programme for 2018: small steps as confidence-building measures towards an insular cooperation. It would be, however, desirable to achieve more.

The FES office in Vienna

The goal of the Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (ROCPE) of the FES in Vienna is to come to terms with the challenges of peace and security in Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago. These issues should be discussed primarily with the countries of Eastern Europe – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and with Russia, as well as with the countries of the EU and with the US. The security order of Europe, based until recently on the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Paris Charter (1990), is under threat. This is, among others, a result of different perceptions of the development of international relations and threats over the last 25 years, resulting in divergent interests among the various states.

For these reasons, ROCPE supports the revival of a peace and security dialogue and the development of new concepts in the spirit of a solution-oriented policy. The aim is to bring scholars and politicians from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US together to develop a common approach to tackle these challenges, to reduce tensions and to aim towards conflict resolution. It is our belief that organizations such as the FES have the responsibility to come up with new ideas and to integrate them into the political process in Europe.

We support the following activities:

» Regional and international meetings for developing new concepts on cooperation and peace in Europe

» A regional network of young professionals in the field of cooperation and peace in Europe

» Cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions, the politico-military, the economic and the human

About the author

Dr. Reinhard Krumm is Head of the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Vienna.