

Anastasia Kluter, Reinhard Krumm

For a European Progressive Eastern Policy

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FOR A EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE
EASTERN POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, the European Union sought a policy of neighbourly relations with Russia through a partnership and cooperation agreement. It was made possible by the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Europe, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Hopes were also high on the Russian side, with the last Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev, speaking of a common European home.

In the years that followed, the actual building of neighbourly relations with Central and East European countries, including Russia, got under way. Confidence had to be established and new connections made. This was not only the case with the major players, such as Warsaw and Moscow, but across Central and Eastern Europe as a whole, where there was a strong desire for new relationships and exchanges.

This development meant a great deal to German social democracy. Was it the fruition of the policy towards Eastern Europe formulated by former chancellor Willy Brandt and his advisor and close friend Egon Bahr? It had been their goal for West Germany to be firmly anchored in the West while at the same time implementing a policy to bring about a peaceful Europe by overcoming the East-West divide. German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier would further develop this policy of “change through rapprochement” with the addition of the concept of “change through interdependence”.

Steinmeier’s policy was aimed at Russia, which in the 1990s had found itself in the midst of a dramatic transformation, the wounds of which have not yet healed. According to Steinmeier, the stronger the EU’s bonds to Moscow, the greater the chance of a long-lasting peace with Russia. Looking back some twenty-five years, one can clearly see that Russian and Western European societies were equally interested in good relations. Russia exhibited no signs of pervasive anti-Western sentiment.

In the wake of Gorbachev’s policies of perestroika and glasnost, Russian president Boris Yeltsin initially continued to pursue rapprochement. That also appeared to be the plan of Yeltsin’s successor, Vladimir Putin, at least according to his 2001 speech to the German parliament and during an appearance at Westerplatte with Polish and German leaders

in 2009 to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. Subsequently, Dmitry Medvedev, while president, prioritized the EU-Russian Partnership for Modernisation, which accompanied a historically unprecedented exchange between EU and Russian civil societies and their economies.

Russia’s difficult situation was not unique. The former Soviet republics of Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were also undergoing transitions, but unlike Russia, after achieving sovereignty they recovered to become “winners” from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia, however, considered itself a “loser”. The hardship of transformation was not accompanied by democracy and prosperity domestically and resulted in Russian becoming a middle power. In this respect, the signals from the regime in Moscow were hardly surprising: Putin’s inflammatory speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference about Russia not being treated as a powerful country in international affairs, the Russian-Georgian war a year later, and most recently Moscow’s military interference in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in defiance of international law.

Russia is currently threatening the peace in Europe with its disregard for international law. At the same time, Russian cooperation with European right-wing parties is on the rise. Yet, President Putin signalled at the 2015 Valdai Discussion Club meeting that Russia is supposedly quite interested in cooperation with the West. The situation is complicated.

To place sole responsibility on Russia for the difficult situation in Europe is too easy and does not reflect the reality. Although faced with trying circumstances, Ukraine has not done its homework, including implementing far-reaching political and economic reforms, urgently needed measures against ubiquitous corruption, and a dialogue with its south-eastern Donbas region. Similar situations can be found in Georgia and Moldova, which have reached association agreements with the EU.

The EU must respond to Russian claims that Brussels has turned a deaf ear to its complaints that although the association agreement has worked from a technical standpoint, political dialogue with Moscow has been lacking. Today when the EU makes political recommendations for the Eastern

Partnership (EaP) countries, dialogue with Moscow is almost always missing from the list. This notwithstanding, progressives must now look forward in confronting the difficult challenge of developing appropriate policies towards Russia as well as the countries of the EaP, which are currently divided between those that look towards the EU (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and those that belong to the Eurasian Union (Armenia and Belarus), with Azerbaijan trying to remain neutral. This means it will be necessary to maintain the ability to react quickly to sudden changes, but such an approach should be incorporated into a progressive European policy of peace and security.

A common approach will be difficult to formulate, however, as the 28 EU countries have very different concepts of relations with Russia and the EaP countries. Not even the four Visegrad countries — Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia — can agree on an approach. It is thus quite remarkable that an agreement was reached on sanctions against Russia over its actions in Ukraine. The sanctions are a clear and important political signal to Moscow, but will they be successful? What exactly should they achieve? What can they achieve? In regard to the first question, if the expectation is a negative effect on the Russian economy, the answer is yes. In combination with falling oil prices and structural weaknesses in the Russian economy, such an effect is being achieved.

Will the sanctions lead to a change in Russian policy? This is, after all, the reason they were introduced, but there are doubts about their potential effectiveness in this regard. Putin is still afforded approval in his country higher than that even for God, and Russia's position has not led to its international isolation. Moscow can still count on its fellow emerging BRICS nations — Brazil, India, China, and South Africa. They did not criticize Russia's actions against Ukraine at the United Nations and are united in protest against what they see as the West's domineering world order.

How then should one deal with Russia in the future, a country that increasingly tightens the screws domestically, where progressive forces no longer have to deal with conservatives but rather unfortunately with revanchists, and where the population still criticizes domestic policy but supports the government's foreign policy? The EU looks weaker than ever, with one crisis after another, from Greece to refugees, a "Brexit", and questions about the future of the common currency.

For social democracy, foreign policy has always been a policy of peace. Today progressives have to deal with a situation in Europe where peace is in danger. To this end, the EU's eastern policy should concern itself with a future security structure. Is the assumption still valid that security in Europe is not possible without Russia? The situation today seems to confirm just that. Armed conflict has again become a policy option, especially since the incursion of foreign troops into Afghanistan and Iraq.

Basically, progressives have to clarify what their interests are towards Russia and the EaP countries. How should the relationships evolve? Which rules should be valid ways for countries to deal with one another, including relationships between small and large countries? In general it should be according to the rules of the Charter of Paris (1990), that is,

"settle disputes by peaceful means" and "refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State".

Answering the above questions should result in guidelines for a European social democratic policy. In the process, it is not so much about abandoning "change through rapprochement", but about a "new phase" within the framework of European peace and security policy. Such a policy will not emerge in one fell swoop, but rather in stages and through an intense process of brainstorming. This is particularly the case given that not only a European discourse but also national discourses will be politically contentious to debate.

Brandt asserted, "Peace isn't everything — but without peace everything is nothing." Social democracy must be the engine for a peace policy. Are there still common positions for resolving problems in the fields of food security, climate change, and the fight against terrorism? What would an energetic approach to the advance of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq look like? These topics may extend further afield than Europe geographically, but they are of vital importance for the future of the continent.

With this publication, three social democratic institutions — the Dutch Foundation Max van der Stoep (FMS), the Polish Amicus Europae Foundation of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and the German Friedrich Ebert Stiftung — have tried to get closer to formulating progressive positions on policy towards Eastern Europe. Only thanks to the excellent cooperation of Ireneusz Bil, director of the Amicus Europae Foundation, and Arjen Berkvens, director of FMS, did we succeed.

Even though such discussions still remain controversial on the national level, the five positions presented from Bulgaria, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and Romania stem from two meetings in Berlin and Warsaw that brought together politicians, civil society representatives, and experts from different European countries to discuss the contours of a social democratic eastern policy.

We would like to end with a quote from Robert Schuman, one of the founders of European integration. In 1963 Schuman had already argued, "We must build a united Europe not only in the interest of the free nations, but also in order to be able to admit the people of Eastern Europe into this community if, freed from the constraints under which they live, they want to join and seek our moral support." Schuman's dream will not be fulfilled until the integration process embraces all willing European nations, including a satisfying, sustainable, and peaceful formula for cooperation with Russia.

Berlin, November 2015

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RUSSIA: HANDLING A DIFFICULT PARTNER

REACTING RESOLUTELY AND PRUDENTLY TO RUSSIA'S BREACH OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

When the first "little green men" appeared on the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea at the end of February 2014, international observers rubbed their eyes, bemused. Was it actually possible that twenty-five years after the fall of the iron curtain, international treaties and prevailing international law could be so blatantly stepped upon and that Russia, with its own half-heartedly disguised soldiers, could rip territory out of the Ukrainian state to integrate it into its own federation, all under the euphemistic guise of "reuniting" the Crimea with Russia. Before the West fully understood what was happening, facts had already been created. Russia had scored a surprise coup and presented a *fait accompli* to the world.

Nevertheless, the prudence with which the West reacted to this breach of international law was the correct approach. The initial decision not to respond militarily, but with political, diplomatic, and economic instruments, was forceful. A military reaction could have led to an escalation with unforeseeable consequences. At the same time, one had to accept that the chosen path would not bring about quick solutions. Anyone who hoped that Russia would be so impressed by the political and economic sanctions that its Ukrainian policies would undergo an immediate review was mistaken. One should not, however, dismiss the possibility that the determination and coherence of the West might have surprised the Russian leadership and possibly prevented further escalation.

In spring 2014, Russian president Vladimir Putin was already talking about a *Nowo Rossija* (New Russia), a zombie state in eastern Ukraine, as a realistic policy pursuit. One no longer hears such talk. Russia may now be aware of the economic and political price it would pay should the situation in eastern Ukraine again come to a head, especially in the context of any part of eastern Ukraine declaring "independence".

UNITY AS A PREREQUISITE TO SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS

Germany took on leadership responsibility in the Ukraine crisis, and a prerequisite for this was the establishment of

unity within the European Union as well as across the Atlantic. In Germany, there was broad consensus on the issue from the outset of the crisis. The Berlin government successfully contributed to establishing (and thus far maintaining) consensus at the EU level and on the other side of the Atlantic. Despite some differences, the past eighteen months have once again shown how important the transatlantic partnership actually is, based on a common foundation of values and interests. Nevertheless, it is just as important to emphasise that this partnership is not directed against Russia, but contains an offer of cooperation with Russia on equal terms.

From the start, Germany, in its policy formulation, took into consideration the extreme insecurity felt in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, still relatively new EU and NATO members, and in Poland, given their stated need for enhanced security stemming from Russia's behaviour and their respective historical experiences. This is even more remarkable when one considers that the sometimes-aggressive rhetoric in the east against Russia raises little sympathy among the German public. Other Southern European states are not as affected by Russia's aggressive manner, because they feel less threatened by it. It was, therefore, necessary to balance the varied interests from the start but still arrive at a common and resolute response. Reassurance and offers of dialogue are two sides of the same coin. Suggestions like delivering weapons to the Ukrainian army call into question the unity achieved and are not constructive contributions to finding a solution to the conflict.

The mechanism of EU sanctions, however, never an end in itself, leaves open the option of returning to dialogue and constructive relations. The message was as follows: Should the Minsk Agreement of 12 February 2015 be implemented, there exists a realistic prospect of relaxing sanctions. At the same time, all steps were closely coordinated with the United States so that here too harmony would emerge on the essential questions.

In the end, only steadfast unity will impress Putin and possibly influence his actions. The criticism of the German government's policy by a US congressional delegation visiting this year's Munich Security Conference was therefore not only inappropriate and defamatory, it above all signalled to the public a transatlantic dispute that damaged our

credibility. Washington and Brussels should avoid anything that could lead to a wedge between them on questions of handling the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Otherwise, there might possibly be only one winner: Russia.

“STRATEGIC WISDOM” AS A PRINCIPLE IN HANDLING A DYSFUNCTIONAL RUSSIA

Russia's behaviour towards its neighbouring countries and its verbal power plays conceal that even before the crisis, it was not in good shape. It lacks much that constitutes a successful state equipped to meet the challenges of the twentieth-first century. It is increasingly authoritarian and despite dazzling revenue during the last fifteen years, it has failed to modernise and diversify its economy. Russia had rejected the offer of a “modernisation partnership” presented by German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in 2007. Thus the government cannot offer attractive prospects to keep young and well-educated Russians from leaving. Young people in particular continue to exit the country in droves, headed for the United States and Europe. In the meantime, they are urgently needed at home.

Meanwhile the current Russian leadership insists on emphasizing so-called Russian values through a return to Orthodoxy and flaunting of national pride. Through this, it is trying to generate identification with the political system that papers over deficiencies in economic, political, and social development. All this springs from a deep sense of insecurity. Government critics, who overwhelmingly belong to the middle class, are increasingly restrained through laws and regulations, suffocating the creativity so desperately needed for the further development of the country.

In contrast to the Soviet political system, Russia's today is no longer based on a unified ideology and self-contained worldview. It is more a colourful mix that borrows from all parts of Russian history. Above all stands patriotism, expressed primarily in loyalty to the current leadership, with Putin at the top. This makes Moscow's behaviour more difficult to predict than during the Cold War, when there existed a more or less understandable strategy. Today the government is driven by short-term tactical calculations rather than long-term strategy.

The Cold War has ended despite moments of loaded language and rhetoric and remnants of an old instinctive reflex or two from the era. The world has fundamentally changed, with new actors on the international stage along with new dangers, among them non-state actors in the form of terrorist groups. Now something else connects Russia and Europe — dangerous neighbourhoods, including Yemen, Libya, Iraq, and Syria. None of the major conflicts in these countries will be resolved without the cooperation of the United States, Russia, Europe, and parts of the Muslim world. One must not forget this.

Russia has recently sent signals indicating awareness of this complex situation. Putin has often reiterated Moscow's position that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad is the legitimate ruler of Syria and therefore must be an integral part of any political solution. The fight against the Islamic State (IS), according to Putin, can only be successful if Assad is included in a common strategy. Thus Putin has cleverly moved to exploit a weak

spot in the West's strategy. On the one hand, after almost five years of civil war, putting an end to the killing has not been successful, while on the other hand, air strikes against IS have not led to the desired results. In addition, Europe is now confronted with an unprecedented wave of Syrian refugees. Taking all of this into account, the West's unambiguous position that Assad cannot be a partner in the dialogue is being put into perspective.

Here, however, one must remain aware of the illusion of taking too simple an approach to a solution. Even if the current impasse evolves into negotiations with Assad, it does not necessarily mean the end to civil war. Most people are still fleeing the Assad regime, not IS. It should not be overlooked that Assad's troops are responsible for the majority of the roughly 250,000 fatalities from the war to date. It is urgently imperative to actively involve not only Russia, but all the regional parties — including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey — in the attempt to end the Syrian conflict.

The modernisation of Russia's strategic missile arsenal announced in June 2015 by Putin will surely not contribute to stability or calm in Europe. It is not, however, a paradigm change and is most likely a message directed primarily inward, as a display of strength. Therefore we should also weigh our responses carefully between what is necessary and what could possibly trigger an escalation that down the road will be difficult to control. After all, the United States has also announced a modernisation programme for nuclear warheads. It is in our own interest that our reactions be shaped by sophisticated and long-term strategic planning, rather than a short-term media frenzy. We must not now endanger that which we so carefully and painstakingly built in our European peace treaty in the last decades through thoughtless statements.

In 1967 Belgian foreign minister Pierre Harmel postulated the creation of a permanent and fair peace treaty for the whole of Europe as embodying “strategic wisdom”. He formulated the combination of “deterrence and détente” as a strategy, or in other words, security as the sum of defence and détente. Thus an essential building block was laid for the policy of détente that ultimately led to the demise of the East-West conflict and the fall of the iron curtain.

Today, political dialogue between the West and Russia is still needed. NATO emphasised this at its summit in Wales in September 2014. We therefore also welcome Russia and the United States to initiate direct talks. Whether telephone calls between Presidents Putin and Barack Obama or meetings between Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Secretary of State John Kerry, every contact offers the chance to look for ways out of the crisis and to break through the vicious circle of hardening and confrontation.

RENAISSANCE OF THE OSCE: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR DE-ESCALATION

Germany wants to use its 2016 presidency of the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) to explore ways of stopping the deepening of rifts in Europe and promote the possibility of reactivating bridge building. The Ukrainian crisis has put tremendous pressure on the OSCE and the entire security order in Europe. The normative basis of the organiza-

tion has eroded and in part broken down. What began promisingly with the Charter of Paris twenty-five years ago has yielded to deep disillusionment.

It is precisely in such a precarious political situation that it is essential to protect and strengthen the OSCE as much as possible, which, as is well known, also stretches across the Atlantic, as a political instrument and platform for dialogue. Germany will therefore use its OSCE presidency to strive for long-term renewed dialogue, trust, and security in Europe.

This following, however, is also clear: Without a solution to the conflict in the Ukraine on the basis of the Minsk package of measures, it will be difficult to reach a common understanding on the European security order. If we therefore strive for a dialogue, it will initially require a serious and controversial discussion about opposing ideas, interests, and perceptions.

Crisis management forms an important part of the OSCE's work. It proves its significant skills in this regard daily, through the Special Monitoring Mission in the Ukraine and other operations in conflict regions. We should reinforce this crisis management ability financially and with human resources throughout the entire OSCE.

Germany, during its presidency, will also promote the many topics dealt with in all three of the OSCE's "dimensions": the politico-military; the economic and environmental; and the human. Especially important are topics that in our view can help build mutual confidence or bridges. For this purpose there are central elements in the political-military dimension, such as in regard to the Vienna Document on building confidence and security, possibly including in the field of conventional arms control. We must urgently undertake new efforts to diminish the danger of military conflict through more transparency and confidence building. Other fields that should be prioritised are the common threats to all OSCE states: international terrorism, radicalisation that leads to terrorism, international drug trafficking, and risks to cyberspace in particular.

There can only be a safe Europe if human rights and basic freedoms are respected. We do not seek to demand new commitments in this regard, but for the time being to work on implementing existing ones. In this era of propaganda and "hybrid warfare", the focus must be on freedom of opinion, freedom and independence of the media, and the security of journalists.

The Helsinki Final Act, adopted forty years ago, seeks to promote contact and understanding among civil societies. Precisely at this time, when many of our counterparts in numerous countries are under enormous pressure, contact between and among civil societies is tremendously important and possibly offers the key to overcoming long-lasting confrontation.

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FROM THE “YEAR OF FRIENDSHIP” TO MH17

The people of the Netherlands will always remember the summer of 2014. On 17 July 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) was shot down over eastern Ukraine, falling to earth near Torez, an area of Donetsk, at the time held by rebel forces supported by the Russian Federation. Among the 298 victims were 193 Dutch citizens. Suddenly the Netherlands was drawn into the Ukrainian conflict, along with other countries, with serious consequences for Dutch-Russian relations.

THE NETHERLANDS AND RUSSIA

Balancing between a moral and a pragmatic trade-oriented approach has always been part and parcel of Dutch economic policy. The Netherlands advocates fundamental freedoms worldwide and on many occasions has had to reconcile this with its economic interests. For instance, trying to sell Leopard tanks to Indonesia in 2012 was so controversial, due to the human rights situation in Maluku and Papua provinces, the former Dutch colony had to turn to Germany instead. In general, the Netherlands is well known for pragmatic policies focusing on trade, which has been the key to a successful economic strategy. Rotterdam is Europe's largest harbour, and Schiphol, in Amsterdam, a leading air transport hub.

The official website for Holland states, “The Netherlands has trade in its DNA. Throughout the centuries, this relatively small northern European country has been one of the world's leading trading nations. The Netherlands established naval trade routes that opened the door to our modern-day global economy. Today, the Dutch economy is still driven by export. Holland is the world's fifth largest exporter, and the country owes 70 percent of its gross national product to export.” Since the 1970s, the Netherlands has also generated significant amounts of income thanks to large natural gas reserves in the northern part of the country. In recent years, however, these reserves have begun to dwindle, and now the goal of the Netherlands' energy policy is to become the “gas roundabout” for the storage and distribution of natural gas to the rest of Europe. Ensuring sufficient amounts of gas

from diverse sources and locations is important for a secure supply and competitive pricing. Natural gas from the Russian Federation through the North Stream pipeline is of crucial importance to this goal, so good relations with Russia are of utmost importance in achieving it.

Trade relations between Holland and Russia date back to the sixteenth century. Of particular note is the visit to the Netherlands by Peter the Great in 1697 to learn the craft of shipbuilding. Tsar Peter had sought to modernise Russia, and for this, Holland served as an example. Later, a direct link was established between the Dutch and the Russian monarchies when the Russian princess Anna Pavlovna married King Willem II in 1816, bringing Romanov blood to the House of Orange. Today, the Netherlands is one of the Russian Federation's largest trade and investment partners. The Netherlands exports machinery and chemical and agricultural products, among other items, while Russia exports oil, natural gas, metal, iron, and steel. Given the two nations' relations, an official “year of friendship” seemed a good idea.

THE YEAR OF FRIENDSHIP TURNS UNFRIENDLY

Declaring 2013 the “year of friendship” between the Netherlands and the Russian Federation appeared to provide an excellent opportunity to celebrate good bilateral relations and to further economic cooperation. Instead, the year was marred by numerous “undiplomatic” incidents. The Netherlands, a world leader in agribusiness, was not amused in early January when its veal was banned from the Russian market. A proposed Russian anti-gay law prohibiting “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” led to another conflict in February, when the Dutch foreign minister, Frans Timmermans, condemned the legislation. Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, then accused Timmermans of meddling in Russian affairs. A visit to Amsterdam by Russian president Vladimir Putin on 8 April was met with a huge demonstration of Dutch LGBT advocates and their supporters. In July, Dutch potatoes were hit with a trade embargo, and on 4 July Dutch documentary filmmakers were arrested

in Russia on suspicion of producing “gay propaganda”, and other filmmakers were denied Russian visas. In September, the crew of Greenpeace’s Arctic Sunrise, sailing under the flag of the Netherlands, was arrested and accused of piracy.

The following month, a Russian diplomat, Dmitry Borodin, was accused of abusing his children and as a result was arrested in Scheveningen, the latter being a violation of Borodin’s diplomatic immunity. As a consequence, angry Russians demonstrated in front of the Dutch embassy in Moscow, and Putin demanded an apology, which Timmermans later offered. Also in October, the Dutch diplomat Onno Elderenbosch was assaulted in his Moscow apartment, and a few days later, a break-in occurred at a Russian-owned house in The Hague. All these events resulted in turning a planned November visit to Russia by King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima into a controversy. It was supposed to have been the cherry on top of the pie in the celebratory year of friendship. The overall feeling that year, however, was one of disappointment and unease.

MAIDAN

In autumn 2013, there had been high hopes that the Ukrainian government would sign an association agreement with the European Union at the Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Vilnius. That Ukraine declined at the last moment was a shock, leading to the Euro Maidan protests in Kiev and eventually to overthrowing the government. The Netherlands had always supported the ambitions of countries in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood to move closer to Europe. In December 2013, Foreign Minister Timmermans travelled to Kiev’s Maidan to speak with members of the opposition. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev would later criticise the EU ministers who visited Maidan, accusing them of “meddling in internal affairs”.

According to Dutch government policy, it was up to the Ukrainians to decide whether to sign an association agreement. At the same time, however, it had long been the official Dutch position, and that of the European Commission, that the countries of the European Neighbourhood/EaP not become EU members. As Romano Prodi, then-president of the European Commission, described it, “It is sharing everything, but institutions.” The Dutch government also had a track record of supporting democratic forces in Central- and Eastern Europe for almost twenty-five years by training political parties and diplomats and supporting nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The Russians had made note of such support, and in November 2007 President Putin asked Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende to halt financial assistance to Russian NGO’s involved in monitoring public opinion and human rights. Putin accused them of working under “barely legal circumstances”.

In February 2014, the “cold war” between the two countries suddenly faded. The Netherlands sent the highest-ranking delegation possible — the king, queen, and prime minister — to the opening ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi. Belgium, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States had all decided not to send high-level delegations because of the human rights situation in Russia. The

Russians were thrilled about the Dutch delegation. Prime Minister Mark Rutte, however, must have felt some unease during the opening ceremony, as behind him sat Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, Viktor Yanukovych of Ukraine, Ilham Alijev of Azerbaijan, and Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. “A company of authoritarian post-Soviet leaders, all gold medallists in the discipline of political repression”, the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* reported. Many Dutch were embarrassed by the high level of their country’s official delegation, but the “highlight” of the visit was still to come.

On the evening of 9 February, President Putin made a surprise visit to Holland’s Heineken House, sponsored by the world famous brewery. The Dutch king and queen, athletes, and fans were there celebrating one of the many victories of the Dutch ice skating team. Pictures of Putin and King Willem-Alexander toasting with Heineken Pilseners made the headlines the following day. After the disastrous year of friendship, everything seemed to have returned to normal. In March, however, the Russians would invade the Crimea region of Ukraine and completely change the game.

After the annexation of Crimea, the Dutch scholar Tony van der Togt wrote the following in “How Should Europe Respond to Russia? The Dutch View”, an article for the Wider Europe Forum of the European Council on Foreign Relations:

Respect for international law and support for the post-war security order are important principles in Dutch foreign policy. Therefore, when the Ukraine crisis broke out, the Netherlands strongly condemned Russia’s annexation of Crimea and Moscow’s support for the destabilisation of the Donbas. The Netherlands worked closely together with the EU and other international partners on the issue. When sanctions were discussed in the EU, the Netherlands followed Germany’s lead as the main international mediator in the conflict; like Germany, the Netherlands at first did not favour imposing stronger economic and financial sanctions, in part because of its own economic interests in Russia.

THE IMPACT OF THE DOWNING OF MH17

The attack on MH17 naturally had an enormous impact on Dutch society. The policies of the European Union, however, did more than Dutch government policy to fundamentally change formal relations between the Netherlands and Russia. Foreign Minister Timmermans had been outspoken in rejecting the Russian invasion of Crimea and the Russian-backed revolt in eastern Ukraine. The Netherlands was on board with the imposition of EU sanctions before the MH17 incident as well as after it. MH17 changed Dutch public opinion and dramatically increased the Netherlands’ involvement in the conflict.

In the months immediately following the attack on the passenger plane, the practicalities of the event’s aftermath dominated political and public debate. Repatriating the victims became the government’s first priority, and investigating the incident and bringing the perpetrators to justice was its second. The Dutch Safety Board led the investigation of the incident and coordinated an international team of investigators. On 13 October 2015, the board concluded, “The crash of flight MH17 on 17 July 2014 was caused by the detonation

of a 9N314M-type warhead launched from the eastern part of Ukraine using a Buk missile system”.

The criminal investigation by the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) has not yet been completed. It is aimed at identifying suspects and is being conducted by an international team. Through the JIT, the Netherlands Public Prosecutor's Office and the Dutch National Police are working together with police and judicial authorities from Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, and Ukraine. The purpose of the criminal investigation is to establish the facts, identify those responsible for the crash, and collect evidence that can be used in court. Results are expected in 2016. Whether the perpetrators will ever be brought to justice remains unclear. The leaders of Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and Ukraine lobbied Putin to refrain from using Russia's veto power against a UN tribunal to look into the incident, but he refused. Alternatives are therefore being examined.

WHAT SHOULD PROGRESSIVES DO?

For the Netherlands and other countries, solving the case of MH17 is of vital importance. They should be careful not to let the issue slip because of competing priorities, including brokering peace deals with Russia for the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. In conversations about possible dialogues with Russia, it should not be forgotten that the parties responsible for attacking MH17 will have to be prosecuted and punished at some point. This is a matter of principle, and principles should matter to progressives.

It is unfortunately a reality that there is, indeed, a new cold war with Russia, although it is not comparable to the situation in the second half of the twentieth century. The time of happy-go-lucky trade relations is over. The EU and its partners have to be firm in their reactions to the new Moscow doctrine. It is not realistic to just count on negotiations with Putin and hope everything will turn out ok. Putin's track record shows that he does not negotiate to reach consensus, but uses negotiations to stall and achieve his goals on the ground, like he did in Georgia in 2008.

Although not closing the door on negotiations, the EU and its partners cannot simplistically expect them to be successful. The EU now needs to put in motion a strong, parallel backup plan. The economic sanctions are a good start, but they are a long-term instrument and will likely require years to have any real effect on Putin's behaviour. There is also the risk that at some point Putin will strike back, so the EU and its partners have to be prepared for whatever might come their way. The EU therefore needs a unified and strong defence strategy. Putin has shown that he is willing to ignore international laws, orders, and agreements. The EU and its partners need to protect themselves against this in case he makes an unexpected move, as he has so often done in the past. On the one hand, they need to beef up their own security measures and budgets to deal with this potential threat. MH17 has shown that the threat might not be as far away as one thinks, and it can endanger Europe directly. The Russian military's "reconnaissance" flights over European airspace that seem to occur regularly and without transponders activated are a clear risk to European security.

Safety, however, is more than being prepared militarily. In today's complex world, the use of armed force is only one of an assortment of foreign policy instruments. Diplomacy, dialogue, trade, aid, and promotion of democracy and the rule of law are just as important. Real change, however, can only come from within. That is why it is important to support constructive and moderate forces in the Russian Federation.

The EU needs to establish energy independence for its member states for strategic as well as environmental reasons. Some EU countries are almost 100 percent dependent on Russian natural gas. This has to change. The EU has to be extremely careful in any new deals with Russia. Expanding the North Stream pipeline will most certainly be harmful for Ukraine, because it decreases the importance of Ukraine as a transit country and will make EU states more dependent on Gazprom. This is not the way forward.

At the same time, the EU also needs to devise a plan for dealing with the countries under very real threat from Russia, that is, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and even Armenia. It is delusional to think that this is their problem alone. Whatever happens to them will also affect the EU, so it needs to start helping them, not only out of solidarity but self-preservation as well. This does not mean accepting them immediately in NATO should they wish to join, but some sort of plan is needed for them — a very real, practical, and concrete plan for how to protect them. It must be an approach with broad EU support. During the upcoming reform of the European Neighbourhood Policy, more differentiation should be made between the EaP countries that have signed association agreements and those that have not. This should be a priority of the Dutch EU presidency in the first half of 2016.

Progressives in the Netherlands now understand that dealing with the new Russian threat is serious business. That is why in the government's 2016 budget, the allocation for defence has been increased for the second consecutive year after decades of cuts. Progressives should not be naïve. In the years to come, the EU has to deal with instability along its eastern and southern borders and the threat of terrorism inside its borders. Progressives should also realize that they face an enemy within the EU. Radical political forces on the right and on the left sympathize with the Putin regime, explain away undemocratic tendencies, and even praise authoritarian "illiberal democracies". Russia's annexation of Crimea was a real game changer. In post-World War II Europe, one country conquering a part of another sovereign state had been considered unthinkable. Yet, it happened, and it left everyone in shock.

It was difficult for the EU to decide on a unified response to the invasion and annexation of Crimea. Only after the downing of MH17 were serious sanctions implemented. Sometimes it takes a serious crisis to make one focus on the things that really matter. The financial and economic crisis that began in 2008 led to unforeseen changes in the way the EU cooperates financially and economically. In crisis situations, the solution is always more cooperation, not less. To be a real global player, the countries of the EU must act together and not allow outside forces to play them one against another. EU member states must return to the values that brought them together: peace, democracy, human rights, minority rights, justice, and economic prosperity.

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FOR A EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE EASTERN POLICY: POLAND'S PERSPECTIVE

Poland's historical experience with tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union led Poles to be cautious optimists when Russia was accepted into the Council of Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union and became a European Union and NATO partner. Nevertheless, Warsaw was open to various forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Russia, because it believed that alienating Moscow from the international community could have negative consequences for European security. Polish leaders believed that Russia's legitimate security concerns should be addressed in an open and constructive dialogue between it and its neighbours. Moreover, Poland often went to great lengths to reassure Moscow that its turn toward European and the Atlantic was not a move against Russia and would not pose a danger to its security. The Kremlin, however, remained unconvinced. Over time, Poland and Russia's views and interpretations of the changes that occurred in the last decade of the twentieth century were in opposition. While Poland embraced democracy and saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as a return to freedom and independence, Russia perceived it as the "twentieth century's biggest geostrategic catastrophe", as Vladimir Putin put it. Russia's current positions are built on the disappointment and frustration stemming from the country's unsuccessful modernisation and the absence of the necessary assets that would justify its ambitions to stand at the centre of the process of reshaping the world order.

In general, the distrust between Poland and Russia derives from the two neighbours having completely different notions of their own security: Poland sees NATO as a safeguard for peace and the embodiment of collective defence, while Russia views NATO as an aggressive military bloc that seeks to undermine its power. Poland believes that dialogue and compromise are needed to overcome differences, but Russia often views dialogue and compromise as signs of weakness; Poland believes it will be more secure if it is surrounded by pluralistic democracies with strong civil societies, while Russia considers the "colour revolutions" and protest as the work of foreign agents and the greatest threats to its security.

Poland's support of Europe's new and fragile democracies in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine inevitably put

Warsaw and Moscow on a collision course because Russia still considers the former Soviet territories, the so-called near abroad, its natural sphere of influence. Moscow not only questions the sovereignty of its neighbours, but also the legality of these nations' independence from the Soviet Union, attained in 1991. This applies not only to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, but also to the Baltic states — Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania — which are members of NATO and the EU. In the Kremlin's thinking, the loss of these states was simply a mistake that occurred during a moment of weakness. This perspective is unacceptable from Poland's point of view, which is why Warsaw holds that the EU, NATO, and the international community cannot acquiesce to this flawed reasoning. No matter how painful or humiliating Russia perceived the situation in Ukraine to be, it cannot in any way justify Russia's aggressive behaviour.

Today Russia's political and military engagement in eastern Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, and use of frozen conflicts and hybrid warfare as instruments for destabilizing Eastern Europe have effectively eliminated the notion that a partnership based on cooperation and integration can be the driving force for the EU in its relations with Russia. Although Poles are open to a dialogue with Russia, there is not a single aspect of the political ideology, built on resentments, of Putin's Russia capable of developing constructive solutions to the challenges of the twenty-first century. Thus, the EU should also concentrate on defending itself against potential threats by further integrating its member states in the areas of energy, security, and defence. It is important to keep Russia at the negotiating table, but not at all cost. The Kremlin must recognise that red lines do, in fact, exist. Russians largely consider Russia a Eurasian country that should follow a different path than the European democracies have taken. It is quite unlikely that a shift away from Russia's confrontational approach will materialise anytime soon.

Because of its proximity to Russia, Poland feels threatened not only by the Kremlin's bellicose rhetoric, but also by its aggressive actions. In 2009 Russia held military exercises in Kaliningrad simulating a nuclear attack on Warsaw. It may seem unimaginable that Russia would attempt to test NATO's "One for all, all for one" commitment by invading or

waging hybrid warfare against the Baltic nations, but until 2014 it was also unimaginable that Russia would redraw Europe's borders by annexing Crimea. For this reason, Poles make the argument that the EU and NATO must prepare for scenarios previously considered unthinkable.

While Poland has advocated integrating Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine into the European Union down the line, the Kremlin has implemented an array of tools with the potential to cripple these smaller nations economically and politically. Moscow's use of Gazprom and embargoes on select products, ranging from Georgian wine to Ukrainian chocolate, are examples of how it uses energy and trade as political instruments. Putin applies these methods interchangeably to pressure states, including Poland more than two decades ago, that support "European choice". He believes that time is on his side, because the association agreements signed by the EU with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements, will require painful, unpopular reforms. Coupled with Russia's existing and potential trade and gas wars, the Kremlin hopes that the Georgian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian people will ultimately abandon the long-term benefits of European integration and conclude that adopting the EU's *acquis communautaire* is simply too costly. Poland, however, serves as an example that undertaking these reforms can move a country in a positive direction, towards growth and prosperity.

Russia is currently waiting for the Ukrainian government to fail. It wants continued internal instability, but not a total collapse of the country. For Moscow, a third, pro-Russian Maidan would be a welcome development, aligned with its perceived interests. To counter such a possibility, Poles have long argued that the EU, in its relationship with Russia, should view Ukraine more as an opportunity and less as a problem. Ukraine, along with Georgia and Moldova, should be presented a clear, long-term prospect for EU integration in a responsible and serious manner. This would help convince the citizens of these nations that the EU will reward their European choice. This can be facilitated through the EU's visa policy, which should be used as a tool to create strong links between the EU and its Eastern European partners. To make the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries less dependent on Russian supplies of gas and oil and less vulnerable to energy blackmail, the EU itself needs a single energy market. Once this is created, the EaP nations can be supported should the Kremlin wage another gas war.

Poland believes that the EU's objective should be the establishment of an irreversible European orientation via development in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The EaP should be reinvigorated with the aim of taking specific (technical) measures to prepare these states, in the long run, for future EU membership, should Copenhagen criteria be met. If NATO membership is off the table, the EU needs to step in to sustain the European choice as an attractive option for Ukraine's citizens. Thus, Brussels should foster an open door policy that offers the possibility of membership as an incentive for domestic reforms.

POLAND'S CALL TO STAY UNITED

The Kremlin uses every opportunity it gets to drive a wedge between EU member states. Whether luring Greece with the prospect of financial support or enticing Hungary with lower energy prices, Russia uses its economic and political influence to put states in a position of speaking on its behalf in Europe and to question the existing sanctions. Putin had expected a different reaction from the West in regard to Ukraine, namely, a less coherent and less categorical response. In short, he miscalculated Europe's attachment to the principles of international law and democracy. It is important that the EU faces this challenge united, and NATO remains ready to protect and defend its allies.

Poland's policymakers and analysts overwhelmingly agree that although Russia remains a nuclear power and may someday play a positive role in helping address common global challenges, the West should see Russia for what it is — a backward, corrupt, and authoritarian state that is increasingly part of the problem, not the solution. Economically and militarily, Russia is no match for a united West, and its superpower ambitions should be assessed through the prism of its current potential. Having an economy roughly the size of Italy, Russia should not be allowed to dictate terms to the EU, the world's largest single market. Russia is dependent on trade with the EU, and its economic overtures to China should be interpreted as a sign of Moscow's feelings of vulnerability. It is not, by far, a partnership of equals.

A truly united EU, acting in unison with the United States and other NATO allies, can utilise a wide range of tools to influence Russian policies. Low oil prices have already caused serious problems in Russia's economy. If they do not increase for an extended period of time, Moscow could become a much more responsible and responsive political partner. This seems to be the only way that Russia might be persuaded in the future to leave Crimea. The territory's unlawful annexation following the sham referendum conducted in March 2014 should be treated as a breach of the inviolability of borders and the territorial integrity guarantees provided Ukraine by Russia in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. Poles stand firmly behind the notion that Crimea should be treated as an occupied territory.

War in eastern Ukraine presents an opportunity for increasing the role of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Sending a peacekeeping force under the OSCE banner could be a step in the right direction. Creating a multilateral mechanism aimed at monitoring the Minsk II cease-fire in eastern Ukraine with significant OSCE involvement could be a starting point for reconstructing the entire European political order and redefining the EU's eastern policy.

Furthermore, in the wake of the conflict in Ukraine, the EU may be approaching a new phase in its integration. The acknowledgement that there are menaces to the security of its member states could push EU leaders toward a real common foreign and security policy. Only then might attempts to create a "European army", national units under a joint command, be successful. The EU's security is NATO centred, but it should start developing a European strategic culture to supplement the Atlantic strategic culture and be of added value to Europe's security.

The Euro-Atlantic community cannot afford to let down its defences in the information war that Moscow is persistently conducting. The Kremlin has created an effective propaganda machine that not only limits the information accessible by Russian citizens, but also controls the content available to Russian speakers abroad. An army of internet trolls that use fake social media accounts to broadcast the Kremlin's narrative and attack anyone perceived as an enemy has become an essential part of Putin's propaganda war. In addition, Moscow exploits non-Russian-speaking media outlets, such as the RT news channel — available in Arabic, English, and Spanish — and Sputnik, the multimedia news service that broadcasts content in twenty-nine languages.

As nationalistic forces in Russia gather strength and fuel anti-Western sentiments, the EU should act responsibly and with imagination. Moscow's promotion of the "Russian world" concept — with Russia as the geopolitical centre of gravity for all Russian-speaking and Russia-oriented societies — is an instrumental part of opening arenas for future crises beyond Russia's borders. Thus, the EU should support initiatives aimed at countering this narrative by establishing a network of Russian-language media outlets that can reach the Russian-speaking audience in the former Soviet republics.

Poland knows well from history that it cannot change Russia from the outside. At the moment, there is no real alternative to Putin's rule given his popularity and that he often expresses collective fears that resonate extremely well with Russian public opinion. This places on Europeans a special responsibility to ensure that there is space for debate on values within Russia itself. The EU should offer the Russian people a strong commitment that underscores the notion that change is up to them. Even though this change is not likely to come about in the near future, it is not impossible and therefore should be considered a process that needs to be reinforced with a long-term strategy.

As long as the Kremlin continues along the aggressive road of destabilizing its neighbours, Russia will fall deeper into self-inflicted political isolation. The West, however, should not perpetuate this isolation in respect to culture, sports, and people-to-people contacts, as this might bring about undesirable results. Public opinion in Russia would treat this as a hostile move, and Putin would surely exploit any boycotts to support his portrayal of Russia as the "besieged fortress".

Certain areas offer room for dialogue with Russia, and in this regard, the West should extend an open hand to alleviate some of Moscow's concerns. Trilateral negotiations involving the EU Commission, Ukraine, and Russia — announced in July 2014 to help make the DCFTA compatible with the interests of Russian and Ukrainian exporters — are of great importance, in particular for guaranteeing Ukraine access to Commonwealth of Independent States markets. Opening negotiations with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) could produce additional advantages in talks with Russia in the context of Moscow's competition with China over Central Asia. It is important to keep in mind that Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan do not always see eye to eye with Russia, and although they are in many ways dependent on Moscow, they wish to retain their independence. Veto power for the smaller members of the EEU could be exploited as a

tool for pressuring Moscow. For this reason, the EU should open its channels of communication and foster links with the EEU.

Future EU policy towards Russia should be based on firmness, moderation, and gradual widening of space for pragmatic cooperation. As unity on the sanctions is not likely to last in the long run, the EU must begin to think beyond them (but not about abandoning Crimea). Russia's actions will define the future level of cooperation or isolation vis-à-vis the EU and its member states. Poles do not believe that a new Cold War is a viable option. It is neither desirable nor possible in the current era of globalisation, because the world is no longer shaped by a bipolar order. Nevertheless, the EU and NATO should be willing to declare in a friendly, but firm, manner to their Russian partners that although a new Cold War is not desired, they can imagine a period of "cold peace" between Russia and the EU.

Preventing a direct military conflict between the West and Russia should be everyone's priority, but Moscow's abstention from exacerbating the deterioration of the current situation cannot be treated as a concession. It should be made clear to Russia that it would be welcomed as a truly strategic partner of the EU, but only if it halts policies aimed at Ukraine's disintegration and the destabilisation of its neighbours.

The primary objective of the EU's Eastern European policy should be to restore the order built on the set of values agreed upon between 1981 and 1992. If order is not restored, indifference will come back to haunt the international community. It will be more costly to create new rules than to force Russia to obey the existing ones. Although Russia's recommitment to existing rules and codes of conduct should be a European priority, new mechanisms should also be considered to facilitate the process of rejuvenating the European security architecture. Setting up a high-level working group with a clear mandate involving the United States, the EU, and Russia could augment the process of steering multilateral relations onto a new path of interdependence and cooperation. Furthermore, invigorating the OSCE and expanding its toolbox for implementing the principle of the inviolability of borders could make it a more efficient forum for addressing challenges to Europe's security. These efforts reflect the belief that although real reforms in Russia can only result from internal political processes, and not from wishful thinking on the part of the EU, Moscow's foreign policy can surely be influenced by EU policies and political determinations.

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ROMANIA AND THE EU'S EASTERN POLICY

For most of the second half of the last century, Romania was part of "Eastern Europe", that is, the part of the continent under the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Its inclusion was the result of the Red Army's advance across Europe during World War II and of the Realpolitik that dominated relations among the victors.

During that time, Romania's Latinity, a permanent component of its Western identity, could not be suffocated by ideology or political actions. Consequently, Romania was the first member of the Eastern bloc to negotiate and obtain the withdrawal of Soviet forces from its territory, in 1958, followed by the adoption of a more pro-Western attitude exemplified by the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel in 1967, non-participation in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and active contributions to the resumption of relations between the United States and China and the signing of the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. Moreover, Romania participated in a number of projects with Western partners (i.e., the United Kingdom and France) in the sensitive area of military production.

Unfortunately, Romania's openings in the foreign policy arena were not accompanied by a similar opening in internal policy. After some initial relaxation in the second part of the 1960s, the Romanian Communist Party leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, began moving towards an increasingly harsh personal dictatorship in the early 1970s, officially motivated by denying the Soviet Union cause to intervene like it did in Czechoslovakia. At the same time, Ceausescu was more than happy to concentrate all power in his hands, as North Korea's Kim Il-Sung, his personal friend, had done before him, with the effect that internal reform would be impossible before 1989.

Thus, in 1989, the communist countries around Romania enjoyed a relative degree of internal freedom — "paying" for it with strict conformity with Moscow in their foreign policy — that allowed for an accelerated introduction of democratic and market economy reforms. Romania, however, remained stuck with internal dictatorship and external isolation, both being a handicap. The complete collapse of the political system Ceausescu created allowed for rapid political reforms, but the high degree of economic centralisation proved to be

a much more difficult obstacle whose removal would take some time. This handicap cost Romania five years in regard to NATO admission and three in respect to accession to the European Union.

There was no doubt in the minds of the post-revolution Romanian leadership, however, as to what the country should do. Once the Cold War ended, and the Soviet Union disintegrated, it was obvious that the window of opportunity created by these developments should be used to fully integrate Romania into the West and its structures — NATO and the EU. There was a sense of urgency among the leadership, given the lessons of history indicating that Russia would bounce back one way or another. When it did, Romania wanted to be safely anchored in the West.

In moving toward the West, Romania faced tough competition from the other former communist countries, which also wanted to secure positions with the West. The case of Hungary is of particular relevance. Declaring "responsibility" for all Hungarians living outside its borders in neighbouring countries, Hungary was perceived as wanting to use early NATO and EU membership to achieve its objectives at the expense of Romania and its other neighbours.

Two former communist countries in particular grabbed Romania's attention: Poland, because of its pole position in the "race" towards NATO, and Slovakia, given Romania's perception of it acting similarly to Hungary. Once three former Warsaw Pact allies — the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary — joined NATO in 1999, following the 1997 summit in Madrid, Romania's relations with them, in particular with Hungary, began to improve. They did so to the point that they shared with Romania their experience of integrating into the alliance.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine emerged as Romania's biggest neighbour, situated along the longest section of its northern and eastern borders. Russia "moved" some 800 kilometres away, although its on-going military presence in Transnistria remained disturbing. During the Soviet era, Transnistria, the site of massive depots and listening stations, had been assigned the role of a launching pad for the 14th Soviet Army, the main attack force of the Warsaw Pact oriented towards Southern Europe.

Until the recent crisis in Ukraine, Romania had maintained relatively good neighbourly relations with Kiev, centred on the relatively significant number of Romanians living in southern Ukraine. After the crisis erupted, Romania was critical of Russia for its violation of international law and accepted rules of behaviour and supported the new Ukrainian authorities in their efforts to resist aggression and accelerate internal reform.

Moldova, an integral part of the Moldavian kingdom until 1812 and then of Romania from 1918 to 1940, proclaimed its independence in 1991, together with the other Soviet republics. Romania was the first country to officially recognise Moldova's independence and offer material and diplomatic support. Bilateral relations have had their ups and downs, mostly as a result of the nature of the government in Chisinau. Take, for instance, Moldova's attitude towards Romania during recent communist rule in Chisinau. In that respect, a relatively complex mechanism guided trilateral relations among Romania, Moldova, and Russia. Accordingly, every time Moscow had direct control over Chisinau, relations with Romania were poor. Once Russia had to relinquish direct control, it agitated the conflict in Transnistria to try to make Moldova more responsive to its interests.

Bilateral relations between Romania and Moldova underwent a game change after Romania became a member of NATO in 2004 and especially after it joined the EU, in 2007. After its EU accession, Romania became an advocate for Moldova's integration into the union. Romania's membership and the support it got from the union helped bring about the most significant change in bilateral relations, namely, shifting the "polarity" of Moldova's energy needs from Russia to Romania and the EU. Thus, Moscow's influence over Moldova, largely exercised through the supply of energy, diminished.

Romania has also been supportive of Georgia, a country with which Romanians have traditionally had good relations, in its efforts to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Romania – confronted with the difficult double task of managing its internal transformation while trying to obtain NATO and EU membership – was unfortunately slow in repositioning itself economically in the former Soviet space, so its actions there have been primarily political. The exception is the relative attention Romanian has paid to Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics because of their energy potential.

As an EU member, Romania has supported the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, begun in 2008. The EaP was put forward by Sweden and Poland to balance the abundance of attention and resources devoted to the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries in the EU's vicinity.

Like other former communist countries admitted to both NATO and the EU, Romania felt that in comparison to NATO, the EU tended to treat Russia not as a major geopolitical actor with a long history of aggression, but as a benign commercial partner with which it could conclude potentially lucrative deals. That view began to change when the EU recognised that it needed to respond vigorously to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and impose costly sanctions.

The EaP remains the basis of Romanian policy towards the east, with special emphasis on Moldova, which Romania

will continue to fully support in its aspiration to become an EU member. Romania hopes, however, that in the future, the EaP will benefit from a balanced relationship between its economic-commercial and political dimensions with the awareness that Russia sees EU actions in geopolitical rather than commercial terms.

Romania's relations with Russia, now at a low point, following the illegal annexation of Crimea and the military destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, will inevitably improve with time. The former communist countries will have to go along with this. When relations begin to improve, it should be a gradual rapprochement in parallel with maintaining a strong element of deterrence to prevent Moscow from initiating more aggressive moves. By what it did in Ukraine, and how it did it, Russia lost its credibility in the eyes of eastern Europeans only twenty-five years out from its former sphere of influence.

Evidently, any resumption of "business as usual" with Russia will depend on developments in Ukraine, particularly on Russia's future behaviour towards its neighbour. The February 2015 Minsk II agreements hopefully stand a chance of being implemented, which would be conducive to a relaxation of tensions, thus allowing for a durable solution that permits Ukraine to restore sovereignty on its territory, implement the deep reforms it has adopted, and realise its European aspirations. That said, it should not be overlooked that the situation could deteriorate quite rapidly. In this regard, the EU, along with NATO, should not be caught off guard, but remain ready and prepared to respond appropriately.

To the south, the EU is challenged by the terrorism of the Islamic State (IS) and by the "human tsunami" of refugees, mainly from IS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq. The primary danger set in motion by these challenges – distinct from responding to the emergency and organizing to integrate the large masses of refugees into the EU – is a turn toward the renationalisation of EU common policies (which took a long time to become accepted) and undermining of solidarity under the weight of increased acrimony between member states if not properly managed. It all might very well initiate the beginning of the regrettable end for the union.

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“WHAT IS THE DEFINING OBJECTIVE OF THE EU’S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY?”

The unprecedented refugee crisis sweeping across Europe has radically transformed the meaning of “recent developments”. Until mid-2015, the concept mainly evoked the consequences of the Ukraine crisis, but today the overriding “development” is clearly the exodus of millions from their homes in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia and their flight not so much to the European Union as such, but in particular to Germany and Northern and Western Europe.

Of course, the whole range of other processes unfolding over the past several years within the EU and throughout adjacent regions — from the growing lines of division within the EU to the post-Arab Spring disintegration of states and the parallel rise of the Islamic State, and not least, the crisis developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood — all remain of crucial relevance when attempting to redesign EU foreign and security policy (FSP) in light of the new realities emerging on the horizon of the foreseeable future. Together with the overriding impact of the refugee influx, these fundamental shifts have combined to present policymakers and analytical circles with an overwhelming set of difficult challenges.

Where does one begin to try to make sense of the nature and interaction of the multiple and seemingly almost intractable challenges? It seems that all too often, debates within the EU and member states have been dominated by the urge to find short-term solutions to increasingly threatening developments with no clear idea as to what the final outcome of one or another action should be.

THE DEFINING OBJECTIVE

A return to basic assessment and clear definition of the defining strategic objectives of EU external policies must be the starting point for making proper sense of the said set of challenges, thus permitting the formulation of corresponding policy guidelines that best safeguard the vital shared interests of member states and the EU itself. Such a return to basic “guiding lights” should be grounded in and proceed from the imperative requirement for policy to best serve the life-defining interests and expectations of the citizens in every

member state of the union. In practical terms, the fundamental choice regarding the defining objective of European FSP comes down to adopting one of two basic strategic options:

- adherence to the objective adopted post-1989 of continuously remaking Europe —and, one might add, beyond! — by means of extending Western institutions, mostly developed in the preceding bipolar world, or
- adherence to the objective of sustaining and developing the European project of a European way of life with dignity and increasing welfare within the alternative strategic context of coexistence with other powers, such as Russia.

It should be more than obvious that it is the latter option that by far best serves the true interests of European citizens in that it puts the objective of ensuring the necessary environment for their well-being and security at the centre of European external policy. This — by means of arrangements firmly grounded in the realities of the world beyond the EU and the understanding that there must be a genuine mutual recognition of diverging interests — is subject to the discipline of commonly subscribed to multilateral rules of international conduct.

It seems that of late, there has been a growing number of voices arguing in favour of a strategic paradigm shift from “expansion by osmosis” and towards co-habitation with agreed-upon rules as the better option. Yet it still appears that most official thinking and deliberation in Brussels and in member state capitals remains stuck in a “more for more” conditionality mind set, a distinctly unpromising approach as regards the development and adoption of a truly forward-looking, renewed, and reenergized European FSP.

Furthermore, the alternative option in the terms outlined above represents the minimum starting point for the construction of an FSP capable of ensuring the external environment framework necessary for successful stabilisation and of furthering all-round EU development. Such a full-fledged framework requires a clear progressive alternative for the EU’s FSP, building not simply on “coexistence”, but rather on the determined promotion of genuine partnership.

PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES

Before outlining the basic features of such a path-breaking FSP alternative, it is necessary to summarise the principal challenges facing the union at present. The refugee influx has highlighted with dramatic effect the serious internal divergences between the EU's individual member states and sub regions. This differentiation had already been identified in European Commission communications noting that after 2008, the EU had ceased to function as a recognised "convergence machine" and was instead experiencing growing degrees of differentiation, particularly between the western and eastern members. This basic threat to the very future of the union is vividly highlighted today in the multi-layered challenge of managing migration while safeguarding citizens' freedom of movement, one of the four fundamental freedoms defining the core of the union construct.

Another basic fault line is the Economic and Monetary Union's malfunctioning, which during the recent recession actually led to deepening imbalances between northern and southern members and to severe social and economic dislocations throughout the union. The resulting unprecedented inclination to "expel" a member state, namely, Greece, from the Eurozone, rather than rally genuine solidarity, is among the most significant new developments highlighting the novel challenges confronting the EU.

Although outside the realm of external relations, the two challenges outlined above have everything to do with formulating a future FSP because of the obvious interdependence between the internal functioning of the union and the defining objectives and potency of its external presence, most importantly in the Eastern Neighbourhood. There, for the first time since 1975 post-Helsinki Europe, the immediate threat of engaging in war as a possible and premeditated policy option has re-emerged, exposing the singular failure of the international community at large and of European states and societies in particular to ensure the irreversibility of peace. This is a truly overriding challenge, requiring a corresponding degree of determined effort to successfully overcome it.

Proceeding further, the European space between the Baltics and the Balkans–Black Sea areas has revealed a multiple set of contemporary challenges involving the national security of individual states in its varying dimensions — armed forces, rule of law, energy, social cohesion, and so on — and all of them being exacerbated by the persistent intractability of a set of so-called frozen conflicts. The complexity and differing nature of the individual countries has exposed the irrelevance of the one-size-fits-all approach of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) of the past based simply on the objective of bringing the partner states "closer to the West", and thus, implicitly, farther from Russia, a clear and defining challenge when reassessing the EaP.

The above leads one to the particular combination of challenges inherent in relations between the EU and the Russian Federation, challenges that perhaps most directly put to the test the ability of the EU to objectively assess evolving realities and its own optimal engagement regarding them. At present, the EU finds itself in what amounts to a schizophrenic relationship of applying sanctions against Russia

while at the same time seeking its cooperation to ensure vital natural gas supplies to Ukraine because of the severe winter conditions there. This is alongside all the other areas of clear mutual interest for constructive collaboration, ranging from stabilizing post-Afghanistan war Central Asia and vanquishing the aberration of the lethal Islamic State (IS) to developing a wide space of dynamic trade and economic exchange "from Lisbon to Vladivostok" and embedding it in a new, trustworthy rule-setting system of security and cooperation for the twenty-first century with full transatlantic involvement and commitment.

This situation unavoidably presents FSP development with a range of extremely acute challenges involving relations with Ukraine. These challenges are linked both to that country's internal development as well as to the consequences from it regarding relations with a range of diverse third countries, from EU member states bordering on or in the immediate proximity of Ukraine to other EaP countries and clearly with Russia itself. The issue of Crimea doubtless stands out as the principal stumbling block to embarking on a course of reducing confrontation with Russia and transitioning to a progressively developing relationship with Moscow, in turn facilitating the development of a new dynamic in relations with the different countries of the EaP.

A PROGRESSIVE FSP?

Proceeding from the alternative strategic objective of a well-balanced, all-round partnership, and considering the full range of challenges to achieving such an objective, what would be the defining features of a truly progressive European FSP for the foreseeable future? Is it a policy that remains faithful to the core values of the lifestyle European peoples want to enjoy and is thus committed to seeking the best constructive arrangements with the union's external partners and interlocutors throughout the Eurasian expanse?

First and foremost, such an alternative policy paradigm must be based on the rejection of war as a policy option, together with a parallel commitment to building institutions and arrangements that make the peaceful tackling of even the most trying challenges to the European and broader world order the only possible approach. This requires that the EU develop and enhance its capability for independent analysis and decision-making based on the best interests of its member states and of the union as a whole.

Further, such an unequivocal commitment to the peace option must be bolstered by a clear vision and policy that ensures dependable guarantees for the security of EU member states and citizens of Europe. This first entails developing and maintaining a fully credible defence capability sufficient to deter any inclination towards military adventurism. Such deterrence must also be complemented by a determined and continual effort to promote the lowering of the level of mutual annihilation and the progressive reduction of armaments stockpiles.

Next, there must be a clear realisation that a robust FSP is not feasible without reinforcement of the EU's soft power capability. This presupposes reversing the dangerous deepening of the east-west and north-south dividing lines, which

in turn requires an updated and comprehensive policy for social, economic, and territorial cohesion, underpinned by massive New Deal-type public investment programmes and projects. Precisely this type of policy must urgently take centre stage in the union's overall policy mix, with an immediate horizon up to 2020 and looking into the distant future. The midterm reviews of the Europe 2020 Strategy this year and of the Multiannual Financial Framework in 2016 provide favourable opportunities for making this happen.

Along with effective cohesion, there must be a return to a clear interpretation and observance of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, meaning the reaffirmation and enhancement of the role and responsibilities of the nation-state within the framework of the EU construct. In the new member states from the east in particular, the authority and capability of public authorities were severely undermined as a consequence of single-minded emphasis on fostering the growth of civil society and the role of nongovernmental organizations, overshadowing the needs of state institutions and ultimately debasing the very relevance of multiparty democracy and opening space for corrupt and strong-arm actors and practices.

Take Bulgaria as an example in illustrating the relevance of the last point regarding FSP. Given the eventual reestablishment of the authority and capabilities of the institutions of state, Bulgaria could play a significant role in promoting stability and cooperation throughout the extended region of Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea. Some twenty years ago, it was Bulgaria that launched the South-East European Cooperation Process at the July 1996 Sofia conference of foreign affairs ministers from the region.

Today Bulgaria could build on its record of consistently furthering good neighbourly behaviour and regional cooperation by promoting new major neighbourhood policy initiatives, for example, the development of a new European macro-region, bringing together the countries of the Balkans and the Black Sea around trans-regional infrastructure projects of clear mutual interest. Such a Balkans-Black Sea macro-region could become an important link between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union, an FSP option that would exemplify the alternative defining objective or constructive partnership that should guide a truly progressive twenty-first century EU FSP strategy.

In the end, will the EU come of age manifested by the adoption of an external stance fully in accord with its core interests? Will Bulgaria prove itself able to deliver on its significant potential as an important regional actor capable of providing unique contributions to fostering far-reaching policy approaches and strategic undertakings in the best interest of European security and cooperation in the twenty-first century? These questions and others demand the most determined action by progressives throughout Europe to ensure reaching their vitally important answers.

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