

# THE RUSSIAN REVISIONISM AND THE FATE OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

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**Abstract:** *The paper looks into the debates on the re-assessment of the existing international security system emerging after the Ukrainian crisis. It argues that the West is in the process of re-comprehending the various challenges posed to the international [security] system by the soft and hard security mechanisms of the Russian Near Abroad Policy. By investigating the foreign policy, national security and defence policy documents of the Russian Federation, this paper seeks to unveil the existing gaps between the Russian and the Western security visions. The present study deconstructs the existing security approaches considered in the West by assessing the possible implications of the two security visions on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries.*

**Keywords:** *Russian Revisionism; European Security; Eastern Partnership; Georgia; Ukraine*

## Introduction

The paper explores the negative effects of the Ukrainian crisis on the international security. The study tries to deconstruct various policy visions upheld in the West with the aim of better understanding the emerging lines of the mainstream discussion on the re-assessment of existing European security system. To this end, the article analyses various policy papers and recommendations, published before and after the annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The study looks at those policy assessments and recommendations which try to uncover existing weaknesses of the European security. Based on these recommendation, the study seeks to provide some guidelines for the enhancement of the European security architecture with the aim of balancing, if not containment, the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the paper seeks to assess Russia's actions in the Eastern neighbourhood. Thus, it looks at the main principles of Russia's foreign and national security policy in order to understand the fundamental differences between the Russian vision of the world order and the Western led international security system. The contradictions

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observed at the level of discourse in various documents and statements of the Western and Russian politicians and policy makers are employed to explain the confrontation between the Russian Federation and the West over Ukraine and Georgia.

The paper seeks to deconstruct the process of gradual transformation of the Russian security thinking, primarily during the Presidency of Vladimir Putin. To this end, it analyses the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2000), the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2000) and the National Security Conception of the Russian Federation (2000), which lay the basis of Russia's vision of the international political system. In this regard, the paper traces Russia's gradual, but increased alienation from the Western, post-Cold War security and policy paradigms. The study also employs secondary sources to assess the discourse on the re-arrangement of the European security thinking by investigating official speeches and policy concept documents at the level of Russian and Western institutions and political elites. The chronological timeframe of the analysis pays special focus to those actions of the West (for instance, the Eastern enlargement of the EU and NATO) which vexed Putin's Russia and caused responsive changes in its foreign policy (latently started since early 2000s and openly embarked after the speech President Putin gave on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2007 at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Munich Conference on Security Policy).

The chosen methodological approach juxtaposes various decisions and actions of the West and the Russian Federation, which caused radical changes to their foreign policy. To this end, the study analyzes and points to the possible effective strategies of containment of Putin's policy in the post-Soviet space. It also tries to demonstrate that Russia's latest moves are not only an attempt to revise the post-Cold War order, but also represent Kremlin's "drive towards the restoration of Russia's 'rightful place' in the world order as a 'Great Power' or major pole in a geopolitically multipolar international system" (Isajiw, 2016).

Theoretically, the paper builds on the securitization paradigm. This paradigm claims that any country's [foreign or domestic] policy line is shaped and driven by a securitizing discourse (Buzan, 1998, p. 24). Stressing particular threats, posed to a state and a nation, is an act of securitization (Eriksson and Noreen, 2002, p. 10), whereas securitizing actors are mainly political elites – leaders, lobbyists, governmental agencies – who mobilize masses to legitimize their desired policy line (Eriksson and Noreen, 2002, p. 10). In Russia's perception, the Western enlargement in post-Soviet space, the rise of Muslim extremism in the Middle East and its spill-over effects in the North Caucasus, the rise of pro-Western governments in some of the post-Soviet countries are considered existential threats to the Russian state and, consequently, legitimize the new foreign and domestic policy lines in Russia. Accordingly, securitization could explain Kremlin's actions in Georgia (2008), Ukraine (2014) and Syria (2015), which arguably serve achieving domestic (i.e. maintaining the popularity of Putin's regime) or foreign (geopolitical aspirations) objectives.



## 1. The Weak Aspects of the European Security System

The 2008 Russian-Georgian war was perceived as a spill-over conflict from the local warfare activities in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, which resulted in a clash between Tbilisi and Moscow. International society did not label this conflict as Kremlin's attempt to re-draw boundaries in the Caucasus or as Moscow's concern to alter the democratically elected government in Tbilisi through the use of force. The advancement of the Russian militaries beyond the administrative territory of the former South Ossetia straight to Tbilisi and the open conflict during August 2008 is a testimony to this claim. The timid reaction of the West encouraged Russia to act unilaterally in the post-Soviet space, even through the use of military power. Similar to the case of Georgia, Moscow decided to act decisively and block the prospects of Ukraine's integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures. Launching proxy wars in the Eastern Ukraine coupled with the annexation of Crimea have arguably had the aim of destabilizing Ukraine and of dragging her in a sort of quagmire, Georgia is found since 1990s. In both cases – Georgia and Ukraine – the integration perspective in the Euro-Atlantic structures look strained by the unclear territorial integrity issues. The separatist/occupied territories represent a hard challenge to be overcome in a negotiation on the potential membership of Georgia and Ukraine into the EU and/or NATO structures.

A range of previously unforeseen challenges (e.g. hybrid warfare, the re-emergence of Russia as a hard power actor) are currently posed to the EU and the European security architecture by the unilateral actions of the Russian Federation in its Western and Southern borderlands. As a result, one of the main principles of the current international system – territorial integrity – was effectively reconsidered by the Russian Federation in the name of self-determination and minority rights protection, first in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (in the early 1990s and in 2008), and most recently in Crimea and in the Eastern Ukraine (2014-2015). The similarities in terms of Moscow's policy actions in Georgia and Ukraine based on ethnic minorities and territorialized ethnicity arguments are consistent with Russia's strategic interests in the 'Near Abroad'.

The Russian-Georgian August War of 2008, followed by the annexation of Crimea and the simultaneous emergence of the self-proclaimed Lughansk and Donetsk People's Republics in the East Ukraine, laid the bedrock of a deep and long-lasting confrontation between the West and Russia and signalled the erosion of the security frameworks in Europe, primarily due to the Russian revisionism in the post-Soviet space. The present discourse of the official Russian elites is focused on key concepts such as "A Strong State" (2000), "Sovereign Democracy" (2005) and "Modernization" (2009), which have been differently applied by various actors at different stages of policy-making. The tensions between "patriotic" majority and "pro-Western" minority (labelled as anti-establishment) have effectively mobilized masses to support the chosen policy-line of the current Russian leadership



(Malinova, 2014, pp. 158-159). In Russia's new foreign and security policy vision the West is depicted as the main adversary, who has continuously undermined Russia's super-power status since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Against this backdrop, this paper argues that the US brokered 'Reset Policy' with Russia, initiated after the Russian-Georgian August War of 2008, America's preoccupation with emerging processes in the Middle East and US's deep involvement in the Asian affairs persuaded Putin to act unilaterally in the wider neighbourhood. Consequently, the post-August 2008 Georgian-Russian War developments and the Ukrainian crisis have signalled the need to formulate a new security architecture in Europe, since the Western-Russian collaboration is significantly constrained.

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has two main implications for the European Security environment: first, it violated the territorial integrity of one European country, and, second, it questioned the existing European security framework. Thus, the current debates at the European level have pointed out the need for revamping the existing European security architecture since the previous European order based on economic attraction, soft power and multilateral institutions did not appear sufficiently effective. A stronger focus on geopolitics and on the need to incorporate hard power could have deterred Russia's actions in its near abroad – Georgia and Ukraine, and more recently in the Middle East (Syria). Moreover, the existing European security framework is also undermined by the weakness of organisations such as the OSCE or the UN which can be easily blocked by the Russian veto (see for instance the frozen conflicts from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and the Donbass) where negotiations cannot move forward without Russia's consent.

Russian's actions in Georgia and Ukraine, in particular, show also how the EU has miscalculated the political, security and social threats posed by Russia in the Eastern Partnership region. In spite of the Western claims that NATO's Eastern enlargement and the EU Neighbourhood Policy are not directed against Russia, a 'zero-sum' security confrontation emerged between Russia and the EU/West. Therefore, it is vital for the EU to reconsider its strategic priorities through the elaboration of new principles, which would effectively address various challenges in its immediate neighbourhood (in countries forming the Eastern security belt of the EU). For Brussels, this new approach might be consolidated through the concept of *shared neighbourhood* which will also include Russia. However, the Russian-Georgian August war of 2008 uncovered existing differences between the EU Western and Eastern members on a common response to Russia. The EU's energy dependency on Russia, coupled with the US brokered *Reset Policy* have brought negative drawbacks in terms of political security of Europe and have had counter-effects on the international security milieu. The 'Reset Policy' has enabled Russia to re-consider its military doctrine and conduct necessary reforms in the military sector. Furthermore, ideology, orthodoxy, geopolitics, as well as quick and



effective military tactics<sup>1</sup> have been useful instruments for building an assertive stance towards the West. Russia's alternative offer to the Euro-atlantic structures has already been crafted in the form of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)<sup>2</sup> and through the concept of the 'Russian World / Ruskii Mir' (a political and religious concept for the Russian near abroad), increasingly appealing in the EaP region (e.g. in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova). Domestically, Russia gains more power from state nationalism, then the Soviet Union received from the Communist idea (Karaganov, 2014, p. 15). The symbolic resources of the new nationalist ideology – traditional values, religion, anti-Westernism – have become the main axis of Putin's new ideology. The 'Russian world' builds on three lines:

1. Soviet nostalgia, where 'the Russian World' re-embodies the Soviet Union. Nostalgia for the Soviet past is quite strong in many post-Soviet and Eastern Partnership member countries;

2. Political nationalism, which proved to be an effective tool for mobilization of population against the West in the name of saving the Orthodox Russia (Francois, 2014, p. 11). Political nationalism justifies Russia's action in its near abroad, since Putin's popularity has increased after annexation of Crimea (Kolesnikov, 2016).

3. Authoritarian state-centralized capitalism, which contrasts the Western democratic/liberal capitalism (West) and sets a different social contract, apparently more inclusive between the state and its citizens. Arguably, such economic model would be more resilient during economic and political crises (Karaganov, 2014).

Thus, the re-emergence of Russia's new ideology based on a distinct ideology should prompt the EU to elaborate meaningful and effective security mechanism(s) for the protection of the partner countries from its Eastern proximity.

## 2. The New (Western) Security Model

The unilateral decisions and actions of Russia in the EaP region push the EU to embrace a new security approach. Currently, the EU appears to face two choices: either to confront Russia directly, a rather unrealistic move for the time being, or to further enhance stability and reassurance across the EU and NATO member states and promote democratic changes and development in its

<sup>1</sup> Various reforms conducted in the military sector of the Russian Federation after the August 2008 war in Georgia have altered the old, Soviet style military system into an effective and mobile one, which proved to be instrumental in the Ukrainian affair. In the case of Ukraine, hybrid warfare, a concept which unites political, economic and informational/propagandist mechanisms – as described by Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces (Minasyan, 2014, p. 51) – has been particularly successful.

<sup>2</sup> In 2014 Armenia, Belarus, Kazakystan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia launched the Eurasian Economic Union, which became effective on January 1, 2015.



neighbourhood. As such, the European organizations should launch a clear common strategy towards Russia and consider additional aspects:

1. European leaders should re-consider their (domestic and foreign) policy interests in the context of the existing [European] security environment, to which Russia is the primary threat;

2. The US and Canada should come in support of the energy diversification of Europe through exporting liquid gas to Europe and via construction of liquid gas terminals, which will thus downgrade the dependency on Russian gas. It is not a secret that energy security is the soft underbelly of the European security vis-à-vis Russia.

3. European states should take a collective responsibility on financial consequences of denying the three Mistral style ships to the Russian Federation (Francois, 2014, p. 3).

Hence, the new security regime of Europe should be further based on the following aspects:

1. The principle of territorial integrity of national borders should be extended to include the political component – inviolability/inaccessibility of internal political order (as the case of Ukraine points out);

2. The Western countries should refrain from demanding democratic changes and stop supporting governments which do not entirely commit to reform (Knaus, 2015, p. 16). Similarly, the EU's policy towards the neighbourhood should be concentrated on consolidating effective statehoods and on assisting them in their future development;

3. Russia and the West should recognize existing regimes of the countries of their joint interests as inviolable and should accept current regimes of the post-Soviet countries according to the principle of 'mutuality'. Moreover, under the apparent collision of the EU and EEU spheres of influence, the new security doctrine of Europe should secure a long-lasting trust and new security architecture between the European and Eurasian institutions.;

4. Relations between Russia and the EU should be based on pragmatism in the sphere of economy, and on balanced relations in the sphere of politics (Francois, 2014, p. 4).

Through this new security model, the EU and US/NATO should respond to Russia's New Foreign Policy Concept (2013) document (MFARF, 2013). The Eastern enlargement strategy and tactics of the EU and NATO did not foresee containment and deterrence of Russia in its near abroad, where Moscow proved to be aggressive. The need of new tactics and effective mechanisms for containment of the Russian challenges has only been addressed in early 2014, as a responsive measure to the crisis in Ukraine. NATO, for instance, launched exercises, airborne early warning and control system (AWACS) deployments in Poland and Romania, as well as air policing in the Baltic region, and increased naval presence in the Baltic and the Black Seas. Building on these immediate measures, over the summer of 2014, NATO developed a Readiness Action Plan by updating its defence plans



and by developing new ones on the basis of the new European security environment, enhancing its military exercises program and considering appropriate reinforcements of its military posture in Europe (Francois, 2014, p. 7). The mobilization of the NATO forces and its military drills in Baltic States, Romania and Poland coming as a response of aftermath developments of the ‘Revolution of Dignity’ of Ukraine, are the signs of revitalization of the deterrence policy, aimed at restricting Russia’s political, economic and military influence over/across its peripheries.

Moreover, NATO and the EU are preparing effective tactics for the containment of the Russian [hybrid] warfare. The re-activation of the Common Security and Defence Policy and the increased coordination and cooperation between the EU and NATO were announced at the NATO Warsaw Summit (2016). Nevertheless, this should not lead to the abandonment of the ENP and the EaP projects. Rather, West should become more actively engaged in the EaP region. If the security of the Eastern European flank will exclude the EaP countries, this will make them even more vulnerable to the Russian encroachments. A negative security scenario will be further detrimental to the security of the EaP. For the case of Georgia this could mean:

1. A weakening of its pro-European foreign policy of Georgia which could further undermine the pro-Western discourse in the country;
2. Negative consequences for the internal political stabilization, since it would sap the position of the pro-Western political groups, while considerably strengthen positions of neutral or openly/potentially pro-Russian political forces operating in the country;
3. The argument held by the pro-Russian forces regarding the non-reliability of the European security frameworks will be justified;
4. Under the lack of interests of the EU towards Georgia, a pro-Russian preference at the level of the political establishment in Georgia will score considerable gains.

The solution to the the current stand-off from the Eastern neighbourhood might come through revitalisation of the ‘Intermarium’ concept, which envisages an ‘entente cordiale’ between the Baltic and Black Sea states. Such initiative could be effective for two reasons: first, it will be in line with the EU’s regional cluster approach and regional security outlook, since such bloc of states would unite countries which perceive Russia as a threat to their national sovereignty, territorial integrity and security. The potential members of the ‘Intermarium’ project could include Georgia, Moldova (and Ukraine), together with the Baltic countries, alongside with Romania and Bulgaria. Such an alliance would improve its member countries’ national security, international embeddedness, institutional coherence and political self-confidence, deter Russia from interfering into these countries’ affairs and also consolidate the ‘voice’ of its member countries on the international arena (Umland, 2016a). Such instrument could be a viable one for the containment of the Russian soft-power in the strategic regions of the South Caucasus and the



wider Black Sea area. A blueprint for this new Intermarium already exists in the form of GU(U)AM or Community of Democratic Choice (uniting Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine) (Umland, 2016b).

## Conclusions

The paper analysed the ongoing debates and highlighted the main factors supporting the argument on the need to re-assess the European security in the light of various challenges stemming from the Russian revisionism in the post-Soviet space. The study argued that Russia's unilateral actions pose some serious threats not only to the Eastern Partnership member states (primarily Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova), but to the European security architecture in general. The Ukrainian crisis revitalized interests towards a new 'deterrence policy' in the context of apparent clash of Russia and the West. The new military activation of NATO and the US in Eastern Europe shows that the phenomenon of deterrence will move from a global to a regional component in the coming years. These changes might be also considered as the acknowledgment of the fact that the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine are no longer considered among the Western politicians and policy makers only as a confrontation between Moscow and Tbilisi/Kiev, but also within the wider ideological clash between the Euro-atlantic community and Russia. As argued in this paper, overhauling the European security architecture is of paramount importance for the future stability of the EU and the EaP region. Against the current background, there is a strong need to integrate the EaP states in a new European security framework. Against the current security tensions from the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, a new security initiative could benefit from the revitalization of the idea of 'Intermarium', which is recently pushed ahead in the European security thinking. Whatever shape it will take, a strong cooperation in between the states situated in Russia's immediate proximity could become an effective mechanism for the containment of Russia assertiveness.

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