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**Stretching to Russian borders and acting beyond them: the EU – Russia
“strategic partnership”***

Introduction

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation has been developing into what the sides describe as a “strategic partnership”. Looking at this relation with a particular focus on security and stability, this paper seeks to understand the reach of this strategic partnership both for the EU’s eastern neighbourhood policy and for Russia’s engagement to the east and west. The EU-Russia relationship is taking root in an undefined security setting where more stable arrangements, such as the EU as a security community,¹ side with still-in-definition dynamics and unstable regions, of which Russia is a part, such as within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) disarticulated framework. In addition, a myriad of new security regimes are taking shape in the former Soviet area, including the Black Sea Region cooperation format, while others seem to be disintegrating, such as arms reduction regimes in Europe, more precisely relating to conventional armed forces in Europe. Thus, the security arrangements in this broad area are fast moving and

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¹ Following Karl Deutsch’s definition of a security community as “a group [that] has become integrated, where integration is defined as the attainment of a sense of community, accompanied by formal or informal institutions or practices, sufficiently strong and widespread to assure peaceful change among members of a group with ‘reasonable certainty’ over a ‘long’ period of time (Deutsch et al. 1957: 5).

adjusting to changing circumstances, redrawing the traditional European security map (including Russia and the former Soviet space).

The promotion of a genuine partnership between the EU and Russia, built on a solid basis regarding principles, instruments and objectives, is understood here as contributing to the stabilisation of the former Soviet space, including Russia itself. However, in this equation of partnership, variables of competition, affirmation and reassurance are defined side-by-side with those of cooperation and concession, resulting in a hard to make calculus. Issues about security building, including a look over securitisation processes, are focus of analysis. In this constellation of security formats, the way power and preferences play is fundamental in the (mis)alignments taking place, both between Russia and the EU, and in the former Soviet area itself, with implications for European security. The drivers behind the EU-Russia relationship are not always clear: are these based on conventional power logic, on normative-driven considerations, or a mix of both? Differentiated approaches underlining action point to the need for a constructive engagement game able to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable discourses and practices. In addition, the forging of a long-standing partnership between the EU and Russia has been difficult: it has been closer to a strategic relationship than to a strategic partnership. The densification of tension, particularly in the first half of 2007, further reinforces the argument, extending it to interrogations about a tendency for resecuritisation of the relationship.

In this context, the goal of this paper is twofold: first, to analyse the evolution of the EU-Russia relationship identifying its many ups-and-downs and how these have reflected in the building of this so-called “strategic partnership”. This will be sought departing from the Copenhagen’s School concepts of securitisation, desecuritisation and resecuritisation as surfacing dynamics both hindering and promoting security. Finally, the paper aims to grasp the reach of the EU-Russia partnership in terms of agreed procedures and commitments, and its practical implementation, with a particular focus on the stabilisation of the neighbourhood. Following this line of reasoning, this paper argues that the prospects for the establishment of a security region encompassing Russia and the EU, and eventually extending to the CIS states, are bleak in the face of resecuritisation dynamics that widen the gap and render difficult the processes of stabilisation to the east. Several aspects account for this, revealing the intricacy of the issues under analysis in this unbalanced relationship.

First, that the variables in the equation are uneven: a security community embodied by the EU versus a disparate and unsettled security framing to the east, where new security regimes attempt to balance regional instability; second, that the EU-Russia relationship is informed by differentiated understandings of security and stability, built around self-preferences and perceptions that shape a very particular and at times deterministic image of “the other”; and third, that the combination of this external and internal vectors leads to mishandling, by clashing over the defining terms of this relationship (both regarding nature and purpose) and having an impact over the ways in which it is rendered operational. The definition of the variables in the equation and the way they are combined in order to attain the envisaged outcomes have revealed a challenging exercise, as evinced regarding crisis management in the former Soviet space and the EU involvement.

The complexity of the former Soviet space with intra-state disputes and inter-state conflicts, crossing political-economic and ethno-cultural boundaries, and inciting neighbouring rivalries, renders this enlarged Europe a puzzle of many different pieces. The way in which Russia, an actor with added leverage power in the area along with well-identified interests, and the EU, through the furthering of its involvement, act and react to instability and conflict in the area is an expression of their commitments and approaches. This has not always been in line or coincident, and many times reveals distrust and uncompromising attitudes. Issues that are analysed in the paper, seeking to understand the dynamics underlining the EU-Russia relationship, and how these relate to the building of security and stability in the EU’s neighbourhood.

Securitisation, desecuritisation and resecuritisation: Russia and EU – back to old dynamics?

Departing from an encompassing approach to security, as reflecting the numerous challenges and different facets of international relations, we understand it to include besides the traditional political-military dimension, other aspects such as social and economic issues. In addition, the issue of security is transversal, involving international governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as differentiated decision-making centres. It takes place in a bilateral or multilateral international context, and responding to a

multiplicity of relations, by pressuring, facilitating, directing, or at least, conditioning change.

The Copenhagen School elaborates on the concept of securitisation, arguing that security is “a self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that [an] issue becomes a security issue – not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat” (Buzan et al., 1998: 24). Thus, securitisation occurs when an issue is taken out of the realm of “normal politics” (*ibid*). “The exact *definition* and *criteria* of securitisation is constituted by intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects” (Buzan et al., 1998: 25).

In a process of securitisation there are the referent objects, those referred to by the securitisation actor as constituting a threat, and functional actors, those who influence decisions in the process, but are not securitisation actors. In this formula, it “is always a political choice to securitise or to accept a securitisation” (Buzan et al., 1998: 29). Therefore it implies for its empowerment the recognition of authority to the securitisation actor, and the general understanding of the issue as a threat. This underlines the need for a convincing approach able to mobilize an audience (Buzan et al., 1998: 25).

When rules are violated and this violation is tolerated on the basis of a convincing argument of security urgency regarding an existential threat, we stand before a case of securitisation. This means that the analysis of political rhetoric and discourse, along with political interactions and the international context where these take place are relevant elements in the securitisation process. The reversal of the process is the return of the securitised issue to the realm of “normal politics” defined as the process of desecuritisation. And this is “the optimal long-range option, since it means not to have issues phrased as ‘threats against which we have countermeasures’ but to move them out of this threat-defense sequence and into the ordinary public sphere” (Buzan et al., 1998: 29). However, the resecuritisation of an issue might occur whenever it is recapped and brought again into the exceptional dimension by an act of securitisation. The recent securitisation moves in the EU-Russia relationship might imply this resecuritisation of old threats and fears. It seems, however, to be an uneven process, with these resecuritisation dynamics assuming a faster pace in Russia than in the EU. An issue further analysed in the paper.

This maturation in the conceptualisation of security has been reflected in the way Russia and the EU relate to each other. The post-cold war order offered new rules for the international game, requiring adjustments to the new conditions. In this new setting, the Union has increasingly gained relevance and international capacity to act in external affairs, while Russia has been through a transformative process which has allowed it renewed confidence and the gradual reaffirmation of its power and influence. Along the way, the EU and the Russian Federation have committed to the development of a strategic partnership, which according to both sides is sustained on the joint commitment to the strengthening of political and economic freedoms, thus based on the respect for democratic principles and human rights.² In addition, it aims at becoming the “appropriate framework for the gradual integration between Russia and a wider area of cooperation in Europe”.³

The concept of partnership is thus understood as standing above the concept of relationship, implying a deeper commitment between the partners to a defined objective, on the basis of shared principles and goals and aiming at a mutually beneficial result. The EU-Russia strategic partnership draws on these broad commitments and elaborates on more precise objectives, of which the “prevention and settlement of conflicts” and the “establishment of an effective system of collective security in Europe on the basis of equality and without dividing lines” are stated.⁴ The wording “strategic partnership” is easily found in the fundamental documents framing this relationship, but its translation in terms of procedures and practices has not been straightforward.

The EU as a security community shares a set of values and norms built on an encompassing and multilateral approach to security issues, from which benefit-driven outputs are both an end and a self-sustaining factor, both for the EU and for the promotion of security in its vicinity. This is built over a common reading about democratisation and soft power approaches to the building of stability to the east. By a process of gradual socialisation of security approaches, meaning a set of norms and values allowing an approximation to EU policies and ways of dealing, the EU’s “normative model” (Youngs,

² Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the European Communities and the Russian Federation, L/CE/RU/en, April 1994, pp. 5 and 7, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/ceeca/pca/pca_russia.pdf.

³ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁴ Medium-term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000-2010), http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/russia/russian_medium_term_strategy/index.htm.

2002: 103; Walker, 2001: 78) has increasingly been “exported” as a strategy to foster stability in its neighbourhood.

However, and regarding Russia as its largest neighbour, this has not been a linear process. In fact, Russia has been resisting this *Europeanisation* process,⁵ restraining from socialising a security conceptualisation that it wants to be its own. This has been evinced in its reticence regarding the Wider Europe proposal⁶ and in its practices at home, independent and uncomfortable in the face of what it describes as external interference – Russian *realpolitik* playing louder. Thus, Russia would like to see a process where a true partnership, based on equality principles, would be rendered operational and become the engine for EU-Russia collaboration in various domains. Moscow argues the current format does not fit its interests, carrying even a sense of “imposition” of ways of doing, besides a perceived treatment as a “junior partner”, which Russia cannot agree with. “[W]e frankly warned our partners: should this add up to a new issue of the concept of buffer states, or ‘limitrofs’, which first appeared 100 years ago, nothing will come of it, as history has already shown us” (Chizhov, 2004: 85). The different readings about partnership underlining the EU-Russia relationship, and how these affect relations in the neighbourhood, render it difficult to find a common denominator allowing the consolidation of layers of cooperation. It is clear that the institutionalisation of a relationship based on regular contacts and the signing of agreements has not been accompanied by the clear sharing of values and principles on policy procedures.

In Russia, the Soviet imperial logic is still much present: a logic of affirmation and regaining of influence. In this process, the contours of the EU-Russia agenda become tremulous. The values gap, the underlying norm setting differentiation, and the distinct understanding about (un)democratic practices render a common understanding about security and stability difficult. Dialogue seems in many instances an almost deaf talk, with Russian accusations of interference in its internal affairs and EU uneasiness about Russian practices at home and in neighbouring countries. The mixing in cooperative and competitive policies and approaches confers an interesting dimension to this relation: both

⁵ For an interesting analysis of the concept of “Europeanisation” see Jorgensen, 2004: 48-50. For the EU relationship with its neighbours see Dannreuther (ed.), 2004.

⁶ Communication from the Commission, *Wider Europe Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003) 104, 11 March 2003.

acknowledge the relevance of the other, the strategic benefits arising from mutual understanding, and the possible gains from collaboration, not only for the two but for also for regional stability. But they also acknowledge deep differences in understandings and approaches. In this context, the framing guidelines for the EU-Russia relationship are not tight or defined to suit.

Twists and turns in the EU-Russia relationship: from post-cold war desecuritisation to post post-cold war resecuritisation

The EU and Russia are two unequal partners, different actors with different agendas, not always easy to reconcile. While the EU is a regional organisation with 27 member states, built on democratic principles, a multi-level decision-making system where individual interests do not necessarily coincide with the collective, particularly on foreign policy issues; the Russian Federation is a wide country with a unified policy and well defined political, strategic and economic interests, based on a strong hand at home and tough stance towards foreign issues considered vital to Russian interests, pursued in many instances outside the traditional contours of democratic practices. From these disparities in cohesion and internal political unity, as well as from the means to achieve them, there have been resulting difficulties in the building of a strategic partnership between the two sides.

The end of the cold war and the desegregation of the Soviet Union defined a new context where the process of desecuritisation of the heavily militarised and highly securitised cold war years permitted the winds of cooperation to blow. This new atmosphere allowed the establishment of political-economic and security cooperation in a period where Moscow defined itself as a natural ally of Europe, and showed a desire to establish closer relations and integrate into western structures (such as joining Partnership for Peace in the context of NATO and becoming a member of the Council of Europe). However, this cooperative atmosphere did not last long, and shadows came along the way after the initial cold war end euphoria.

Generally, the post-cold war decade was marked by desecuritisation dynamics, despite ups-and-downs in the EU-Russia relationship, with the institutionalisation of the relationship, framed in a cooperative atmosphere, including agreement over the EU strategy for future relations with Russia (December 1995) or the signature of the Conventional

Armed Forces Treaty in Europe, only indirectly relating to the EU, but directly relating to European security. Difficulties on the way included the Chechen wars and accusations regarding undemocratic procedures along with violations of fundamental rights and freedoms. Russia retaliated accusing the EU of meddling in its internal affairs, and understanding the EU and NATO enlargements as provocative. However, and despite the ups-and-downs, dialogue, concessions and many trade-offs allowed the relation to consolidate, despite lacking throughout a clear “strategy”.

In June 1994, the EU and Russia signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) setting the contours for their relations, which nevertheless only entered into force in December 1997, mostly due to the war in Chechnya. Generically, the PCA envisages cooperation in different areas with the goal of integrating Russia in the wider area of cooperation in Europe, the promotion of security and international peace, development of a democratic society, a spirit of partnership and cooperation, and the strengthening of trade (foreseeing the establishment of a free trade area), economic, political and cultural ties. It reinforces the idea that the establishment and strengthening of bonds in different areas of activity will foster the building of security by allowing closer cooperation dynamics between the parts.

This was followed by the drafting of the EU strategy towards Russia, already in a context of tension due to the Chechen war (1994-1996). Crafted in December 1995, at the Madrid European Council,⁷ it aimed to “provide the EU with an analysis of its interests with regard to Russia; to generate guidelines for policy; and to identify future areas of cooperation in all three pillars of the European Union” (Haukkala, 2003: 11). This reflected the Union’s acknowledgement of the new post-cold war context and of the importance of a stable Russia in its proximity. Simultaneously, it resulted from openness from Moscow to this rapprochement.

This allowed the setting of the basis for the “strategic partnership” with the launching of the EU Common Strategy on Russia in June 1999⁸ (translating a formal attempt at upgrading the status of this relationship), as a way of responding to the mounting tensions

⁷ Madrid European Council, Annex 8, 15-16 December 1995, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/mad3_pt.htm#annex8.

⁸ “(...) strengthen the strategic partnership between Russia and the European Union, which is so crucial to maintaining peace and security in Europe and beyond. Cologne European Council, Presidency Conclusions, 3-4 June 1999, p. 26.

that shadowed it, with the Chechen issue and former Yugoslavia on top of discord. It represents the most consistent effort at coordination of European policies and programmes towards Russia, defining objectives as well as drawing immediate priorities for action. The political message is evident: a stable Russia governed by democratic principles at the EU borders.

Moscow responded in October of the same year with the adoption of a document about the Medium Term Strategy for Development of Relations with the European Union.⁹ The document aims at assuring national interests and expands the image of Russia in Europe as a reliable partner in the building of a system of collective security, while mobilizing the potential and experience of the EU in the promotion of the Russian market economy and in the development of democratic processes in the country. In addition, it envisages strategic cooperation in the prevention and search for solution to local conflicts, with emphasis on international law and peaceful means. In this way, it envisages a unified Europe, without dividing lines, and the balanced and integrated strengthening of the positions of the Russian Federation and the EU regarding the most pressing issues affecting the international community in the new century. According to the document, the proposed objectives are in line with the European strategy towards Russia.

However, if at first sight the two documents seem to be in alignment, looking at them more carefully reveals after all some misalignment. The “EU focuses on values and Russia’s need to change profoundly, while the Russian document stresses national interests and sovereignty. The CSR [Common Strategy on Russia] is vague, while the Russian strategy is quite specific” (Lynch, 2003: 59), revealing the pragmatic and realist tone Russian foreign policy has been assuming. This distant way of formulating guiding principles remains very present in the EU-Russia relationship, showing both the distance in the underlying conceptualisations about values and norms and the difficulties in understanding the “other”.

Putin’s Russia assumed clearly realist traces, recognising its weaknesses and searching for the revitalisation of the state, with September 11 revealing itself as an accelerator of this tendency (Lynch, 2003: 9). The concrete realisation that Russia could not do much in the

⁹ Medium-term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000-2010), http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/russia/russian_medium_term_strategy/index.htm.

face of inevitable developments, such as EU and NATO enlargement, made Russia change its discourse since direct confrontation could poison its relationship with the west and lead to isolation and consequently add to the country's fragility. Putin realised the fundamental link between the internal and external dimensions as essential for the building of stability in Russia. The 2001 terrorist attacks and the global fight against terror were used by the Russian president in this search for realignment with the west, and in reaffirmation of its international political status as promoter of decision and influence in international politics. "Integration processes, in particular, in the Euro-Atlantic region are quite often pursued on a selective and limited basis. Attempts to belittle the role of a sovereign state as the fundamental element of international relations generate a threat of arbitrary interference in internal affairs",¹⁰ to which Putin responded in his usual cool and pragmatic way, underlining the potential role of Russia as a regional power. Its energetic policies are here a good example. The Energy Dialogue established at the EU-Russia Summit in October 2000, which has only been showing very modest results, is a demonstration of power politics at play in the Kremlin (see, for example, Likhachev, 2004: 81).

But despite disagreement, these developments allowed progress in different dimensions of the relationship, conferring on it a wider basis for cooperation built over an encompassing understanding of security.¹¹ Agreement over Kaliningrad, reached in November 2002¹² and consolidated in May 2004 regarding the construction of a high speed train and the easing of procedures on the part of the EU regarding the transit of Russian citizens between the exclave and the Russian Federation, constituted a positive move. Around the same time a bilateral protocol was concluded regarding Russian integration into the World Trade Organisation; and Russia ratified the Kyoto Protocol, allowing its entry into force in February 2005.

Earlier, in November 2003, a Joint Declaration was signed in Rome between the EU and Russia on strengthening dialogue and cooperation on political and security matters, with its first practical results, although modest ones and wrapped in controversy, in Russia's

¹⁰ *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 28 June 2000.

¹¹ "Soft security threats from Russia are a serious concern for the EU and require continued engagement – nuclear safety, the fight against crime, including drug trafficking and illegal immigration, the spread of disease and environmental pollution", *Country Strategy Paper 2000-2006, National Indicative Programme, 2002-2003, Russian Federation*, European Commission, 27 December 2001.

¹² *Joint Statement on Transit between the Kaliningrad Region and the Rest of the Russian Federation*, Brussels, 11 November 2002.

involvement in the EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For Moscow, this involvement is important, clearly demonstrating its understanding that a European security and defence policy which does not interfere in its vital issues and to some extent counterbalances and minimises the presence of NATO is welcomed in Russia. But the way it has been conducted has generated discomfort in Russia. “[T]he EU makes decisions on the conduct of peacekeeping operations, while relegating Russia to observer status. I can say frankly that our cooperation on such a basis will flounder, going nowhere. We participate in the EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but this is the first and only case of such participation. We have already declined the EU invitation to take part in several other peacekeeping and policing operations. I believe that our response to subsequent proposals will be the same unless we agree on an acceptable format for crisis management operations that takes into account the interests of all participants” (Chizhov, 2005: 137). Perceptions of unbalances in the relationship not well received in Russia and that slowly have built up and toughened the discourse in Moscow about the need for a differentiated treatment, this is, Moscow demands to be treated as equal.

In March 2005, the first round of contacts regarding human rights, minorities and fundamental rights took place in Luxembourg, opening the doors to the debate of a polemic theme which has been in the disagreement agenda of Russia and the EU. While a first step in the long road ahead, it allowed only minimal developments. But the discussion of issues of concern, and in such a delicate area of the relationship as this, is certainly a positive common ground to start with. Having these long-standing dossiers on the table means that at least they are open for discussion. And this should work as a confidence-building measure. More recently, in 2006 the EU and Russia reached agreement on visa facilitation and readmission procedures, as a further step for the consolidation of political-administrative and security links.

At the Moscow Summit on 10 May 2005, the EU-Russia strategy seemed to gain new contours with a new agreement on four common spaces signed. Having as a goal to build a Europe without dividing lines, thus sitting in the continuum of the language of cooperation underlining the relation, it is built around four areas of cooperation, including a common economic space; a common space of liberty, security and justice; a common space of cooperation in the field of external security; and a common space of research, education

and culture. It is a non-binding agreement which aims at the creation of a common market between the EU and Russia without barriers to trade. Cooperation is envisaged in financial services, transports, communications, energy and environment, as well as on humanitarian and security issues. Together with the neighbourhood principles and the EU Security Strategy, these are described as the “defining expression of EU policy towards the Russian Federation”.¹³ But these principles need to be translated into concrete actions. A goal difficult to attain when themes of discord remain, hampering rapprochement between Moscow and Brussels, and giving these commitments thus far not much more than minimal practical translation (Freire, 2006: 19).

But the twists and turns in the forging of this relationship have been many. Concessions are becoming more difficult in a relationship built over fragile foundations. This is, built over similar language usage, but with underlining different interpretations and readings. The very limited results of the Samara EU-Russia Summit (May 2007) further add to a toughened discourse by president Putin, particularly from early 2007, such as in Munich in February and at the time of the state of the nation address (26 April) where Putin advanced severe criticism towards what he described as western imposed courses regarding democratisation and security building, including in the former Soviet space. “In the past, in the era of colonialism, colonialist countries talked about their so-called civilizing role. Today, [some countries] use slogans of spreading democracy for the same purpose, and that is to gain unilateral advantages and ensure their own interests” (Putin, 2007).

Wording reinforced at the speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, where the Russian president left clear his discontent with double-standards and a disparate treatment, which contribute to the rebuilding of old walls and to the recovering of old images, at the cold war style. “The stones and concrete blocks of the Berlin Wall have long been distributed as souvenirs. (...) And now they are trying to impose new dividing lines and walls on us – these walls may be virtual but they are nevertheless dividing, ones that cut through our continent. And is it possible that we will once again require many years and decades, as well as several generations of politicians, to disassemble and dismantle these new walls?” (Putin, 2007a). This hardened tone in speech accompanied the announcement of a

¹³ Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013: Russian Federation, http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/russia/csp/index.htm.

moratorium over the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe,¹⁴ leaving clear the strains to this bilateral relationship.

The Russian unilateral withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, together with the announcement of an eventual retreat from the INF Treaty (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces), in the summer of 2007 in a context of high international tension, is not promising. Despite not really affecting daily procedures, the Russian withdrawal from the CFE Treaty further adds to dissension. With delicate issues on the agenda, including the anti-missile defence shield, the eternal question about NATO enlargement and the even more enduring issue about (dis)respect for human rights and democratic principles, along with disagreement over the status of Kosovo and the Litvinienko case (extradition of Andrei Lugovoi), the Russian moves are not surprising.

In addition to this dissension atmosphere, concerted action between the two for the revision and readaptation of the PCA to the new post-enlargement context, since the old one expires on the 1st of December 2007, has been facing many obstacles. The almost certain automatic renovation of the existing agreement, as it stands, has been interpreted as a negative sign (see Arbatova 2006; Likhachev 2006; Bordachev 2006; Emerson et al. 2006). On the one hand, it signals Russia's unwillingness to negotiate a new accord, which it understands as contrary to its interests, especially regarding energetic issues; on the other hand, it highlights the reticent posture of the EU in drawing a new model for the relationship with Moscow.

However, the discourse about a new cold war has not been gathering many supporters. Mutual recognition of the relevance of the relationship does not allow it. These moves have, nevertheless, an enduring consequence regarding the implied lack of confidence and trust, besides constituting the sounding alarm bell regarding its desire to be treated as equal. Resecuritisation dynamics that seem to recover the old image of the "enemy" and exploit it, with negative consequences for European security.

¹⁴ The CFE Treaty, signed in 1990 and in force since 1992, established limits on the deployment of conventional heavy weaponry, such as tanks, artillery and aircraft, in an area ranging from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals, and provided for regular mutual inspections. At Istanbul in 1999, a revised version of the treaty was negotiated, however, it has been ratified only by four countries: Russia (June 2004), Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Demands that Russia fulfils its military withdrawal from Georgia (problems in Gudauta, Abkhazia) and Moldova (Transnistria), which Russia contests, have hampered the process.

Stretching to Russian borders and acting beyond them: the ENP

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been framing the European policy of rapprochement between the EU and its neighbours to the east. Firstly drafted as a Communication by the European Commission about an enlarged Europe in March 2003 and further consolidated in July of the same year,¹⁵ it offers cooperation in three particular areas: political, human, civil and cultural; security; and sustainable economic and social development, aiming at the establishment of a “ring of solidarity” in the EU borders. Russia has, however, not been showing much enthusiasm about this wider Europe proposal, since Moscow does not envisage more than a special relationship with the EU – the so-called “strategic partnership” does not imply any restrictions to its independent decision-making and doing.¹⁶ It wants ability to manoeuvre in its near abroad and understands this neighbourhood policy as eventually having direct implication in its interests in the former Soviet area.

The European Union approach towards Russia is built over the principle of stabilisation of its neighbourhood, through the development of a bilateral constructive relationship with the authorities in Moscow. Therefore, the EU recognises Russia a special place in its neighbourhood, in such a way that it does not include the Russian Federation in its Neighbourhood Policy package. Despite applying similar procedures and mechanisms to Russia to those envisaged in the Union’s Neighbourhood Policy, the fact of dealing with Russia in a separate framing demonstrates the relevance and weight Russian politics and actions have and which are recognised by the European Union’s member states.

The EU Neighbourhood Policy includes six countries from the former Soviet space (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and from the southern Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and nine plus one in the Mediterranean area (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia plus the Palestinian Authority). The aim of the programme is the sharing of the benefits of enlargement with these states, offering them a privileged relationship with the EU, as a way of promoting stability, well-being and

¹⁵ Communication from the Commission, *Wider Europe Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003) 104, 11 March 2003; Communication from the Commission, *Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, 1 July 2003.

¹⁶ Medium-term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000-2010), http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/russia/russian_medium_term_strategy/index.htm.

security – defined by the three Ps: proximity, prosperity and poverty –, independently of these countries being members of the organisation or even candidate countries. It aims at avoiding, in this way, dividing lines between an enlarged Europe and its new neighbours, directly responding to the objective of the European Security Strategy of building stability in the Union’s neighbourhood (Solana, 2003), and in line with the partnership wording.

In May 2004 a “Strategy Paper” was approved defining closer collaboration between the Union and its neighbours, and including the drafting of “Country Reports” with a bilateral character and according to the most pressing needs of each of these countries, reflecting the political, economic, social and institutional situation in these countries as a basis for the definition of Action Plans. These “suited to fit” Action Plans aim at bridging the differences between needs and capabilities, establishing concrete and simultaneously ambitious targets in distinct areas for an integrated development of each of these partners, particularly in the process of political-economic and democratic transition. According to EU sources, these measures allow the building of an enlarged area of stability and security on the basis of confidence and the sharing of common values, eventually allowing more efficacy in the combat against the new menaces, particularly terrorism and organised crime. However, “an Action Plan with Russia would only be part of the overall ‘strategic partnership’, which includes the Energy Dialogue and talks on a Common European Economic Space. It is unlikely that Russia will agree to a national Action Plan on the lines proposed, precisely because it would lead to greater EU engagement and, therefore, interference in Russian affairs (sectoral action plans might however be possible)” (Lynch, 2003a: 55).

There is ample recognition in Brussels that Russia’s leverage power in the former Soviet area, despite diminished, is still considerable. Despite the colourful revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, and of wider involvement by international actors in the area, Russia’s political-economic and military presence and influence are noticeable. Its acknowledged involvement, at times through consent and in instances sideline pressure render it a powerful actor in the former Soviet space. This applies to ongoing intrastate conflicts in Moldova or Georgia, and to the Karabakh dispute, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, along with much disputed energy resources and distribution. And in fact, energetic issues and crisis management have been on the top of the agenda.

If the EU sees in Russia a privileged partner, when looking at an unstable Middle East, it also understands that the diversification of energetic sources is essential, particularly due to Russian assertive and retaliatory practices in the former Soviet area, with direct impact in the European markets.¹⁷ Enhanced contacts between Brussels and countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, in line with its policy of energetic diversification, have been received in Russia with apprehension, as manoeuvres for further EU involvement in its natural area of influence, and as inciting hostile movements within this area, diminishing Moscow's leverage power. In addition, Russia understands that further integration in the European markets gives it assurances and guarantees of stability, but raises questions about a market that remains very much closed to non-energetic assets (Freire, 2007a).

Crisis management has also been an issue of relevance, particularly in the face of increased EU involvement in the former Soviet space. Despite not formally a mediator, the EU has become involved in the negotiations process for a peaceful settlement of the Moldova-Transnistria dispute, as an observer to the negotiations, and by active engagement: at the request of Moldova and Ukraine, it deployed a Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), in June 2005, as a measure of confidence-building between the parties. It has also been more proactive in Georgia, where the Rule of Law Mission (EUJUST THEMIS) has contributed to institution-building, and more generally to the stabilisation of the country. A gradual enhanced presence of the EU within the ENP framework, with Russian consent and at times dissent.

For Russia, the primary threat to its own security comes from within: it is the menace of civil unrest, violence and fragmentation within its borders (Chechnya has been the most cited case). And it is followed by developments in its near abroad, defined as an area of vital interest to Russia. In this political orientation, there seems to be a clear recognition by the authorities in Moscow that the Russian geostrategic power is under threat. This feeling of vulnerability, with concrete justification in the wider involvement of other actors in its neighbouring area, generally described as a traditional area of Russian influence, explains the Russian collaborative approach. It is a way of preserving the securitarian *status quo*, meaning Russian primacy in the area, according to the Russian model, signing accords and defining the level of western engagement in the former Soviet space, which Russia only

¹⁷ Cuts in the gas flows to Ukraine in January 2006 and oil supplies to Belarus in January 2007, are example.

acquiesces to when convenient. This new posture means a multilateral attitude towards its multiple security problems, but it also seems to be a way of counterbalancing the presence of others in its area of influence and of consolidating its affirmative course.

Thus, a multilateral strategy to cover up for the continuous search for primacy in an area not anymore subjugated to its dominance, to Russia discontent. The heterogeneous CIS area with differentiated states in their political options, economic resources and social profiles, has become a mal-functioning organisation. This means that the Russian goal of influence and control is limited, despite its acknowledged leverage in the area. This has been translated in Moscow's policy of engagement in economic, political and military terms. The perpetuation of military bases in Moldova and Armenia, are example. In addition, the region's vast natural resources push Moscow towards controlling pipeline routes and infrastructures as a way of maintaining influence over local governments, while at the same time profiting from these economic assets. Nevertheless, within limits.

The colourful revolutions in 2003 in Georgia, 2004 in Ukraine, and 2005 in Kyrgyzstan, have caused concern in Russia about the western-orientation of the new governments and its consequent diminished influence. And Russian attempts at regaining influence, by using energy dependence as an element of pressure, have revealed some miscalculation. With interruption in oil and gas supplies to Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus, for example, which ended up having direct impact in European deliveries, Russia faced these countries' and European criticism. These moves ended up having an opposite effect, with Ukraine and Georgia distancing themselves even more from Russia. The immediate effect has been the search for alternative energy sources, in order to gain an independent stance from Russia. The negotiations over new pipeline routes, with many projects bypassing Russia, demonstrate this increasing search for independence from what is described as a non-reliable partner. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, bringing oil from the Caspian to Turkey and further to Europe is such an example. Energetic policies in the area have thus been raising high in the international agenda, with fierce competition over the control of oil and gas production and transit, further deepening Moscow's feelings of vulnerability.

In this setting, regional integration processes in the former Soviet space have suffered from a simple malaise: usually they are regarded as pro- or anti-Russian, which renders their existence and meaning difficult to sustain. This is why the CIS has never been

effective. Interpreted as a Russian extension of the “Soviet Union idea”, which was later consolidated in the Russian leadership role within the Commonwealth, the CIS never functioned as a regional grouping, but more as a Russian-led and pro-Russian politics enhancing group. The result has been disarticulation and disconnection within the CIS, also contrary to Russian intentions of having a unifying catalyst element in the former Soviet space. Simultaneously, these dynamics hamper the establishment of a more integrated area of security in Europe.

Conclusion

The relationship with Russia has been marked by ups and downs, according to developments in the international scene. However, generically, its evolution has been showing signs of progress, demonstrating the recognition that partnership and cooperation are necessary despite the remaining divergences in an increasingly volatile and unstable scenario. The EU-Russia strategic relationship seemed slowly to be giving place to a strategic partnership, built over small consensus. But the resecuritisation dynamics underlining discourse from early 2007 seem to point to an inversion in course. The ambiguities inherent to this partnership, where the conciliation of interests is not always easy, are a reflex of the need to balance costs and gains. However, and despite the aggravation in dissension, the fact that neither side sees its interests as best served by excluding the other, has been restraining the stretching of rhetoric to irreconcilable discourse. The small steps taken in the building of this relationship constitute fundamental elements demonstrating the positive sum game that might result from dialogue, and its much needed translation into effective forms of collaboration.

But the current atmosphere is dense. The complex EU structure and multi-level decision-making dynamics render it an opaque partner, while the Russian way of formulating policies and its precarious commitment to many international principles shows its obscure side. Difficulties in understanding that have aggravated with time. The EU has been following a policy of influence over Russian internal developments through the definition of concessions and bargains in the face of shared interests and objectives. A policy of “giving, but”, which intends, through the introduction of conditionality elements, to pressure Russia in delicate matters, in particular regarding human rights and

democratisation. Moscow has been reacting negatively to the EU engagement and involvement, both regarding its domestic affairs, which it describes as interference, and over the former Soviet space, still described as a privileged area for Russian influence. In addition, the Russian Federation accuses the EU of double standards and demands an equal treatment - as a partner. In the face of increasing strains to the relationship, both coming from within and generated in the outside international context where the interactions between the two take place, a desecuritisation process bringing dialogue to its right place in the political realm would constitute a major confidence building measure.

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