

Europe in Russian Foreign Policy: Important but no longer Pivotal



Thomas Gomart

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Summary

It is now necessary to ask ourselves what place Europe holds in Russian foreign policy, given the recent developments in the latter. Indeed, Europe is by far Russia's most important partner. Nevertheless, Russia is developing a discourse of emerging state, in order to highlight the rapid loss of influence of Europeans in global affairs. Europe is still necessary in Moscow's eyes, but is no longer sufficient on its own. Russia is anticipating Europe's marginalization, all the while knowing that its own level of marginalization will depend upon the relationship that it forges with it. It is necessary to examine how Europe has passed from being a model for Russia's development to a political competitor. It is also important to locate Europe within Russia's different foreign policy options, in order to appreciate its relative importance. This will allow us to understand the way in which Europe fits into Russia's power project, which increasing aims to have a global reach.

Introduction

Questioning the place reserved for Europe in Russian foreign policy requires the identification of what Europe represents for Russia. Russia's historic dilemma—how to move closer to Europe and still preserve its identity—is being played out once more in the context of the "modernization partnership" desired by Moscow and Brussels. This dilemma is explained by Europe's historically central position in world affairs; yet this is changing with the rapid shift of global influence towards the Asia-Pacific region. In its discourse, Russia predicts that the West will decline in status, highlighting the arrival of emerging countries, amongst which it counts itself. In this perspective, Europe becomes one constituent part, among many, of Russian foreign policy. At the same time, Russia is seeking to continue its economic recovery and its return to international influence, both of which involve increasing interaction with Europe. This new balance of power alters the Russian dilemma: it is now a question of how to position itself in relation to Europe in creating its global identity.

In other words, Europe is still necessary in Moscow's eyes, but now insufficient on its own. As part of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev's foreign policy, the importance granted to Europe varies according to the following five factors, listed in order of importance: the global strategic balance of power; global energy geopolitics; security relations with the so-called "sphere of privileged interests"; trade relations with the EU; and relations within the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China).

In Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, Moscow continues to place strategic value (with subtle differences) upon the six countries covered by the EU's Eastern Partnership: Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The relations these countries entertain with NATO continue to lie at the heart of Moscow's concerns. This buffer zone fuels a feeling of insecurity felt in Russia and in some EU countries. Russia is now in a system of competition

Translated from French by Nicola Farley.

This article takes up ideas first presented in the following two lectures: "Russia's Foreign Policy towards Europe in 2009: What Has Been the Main Driver?" Boston, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, 13 November 2009; and "L'Europe vue de Moscou" [Europe seen from Moscow], Paris, IHEDN, 15 February 2010.

and alliance with the EU, which is both its main trade partner and the main framework for political integration on the continent. Putin and Medvedev must carry out their foreign policy according to the following contradiction: Russia anticipates Europe's marginalization in global affairs, while knowing that its own degree of marginalization depends in great part on the type of relationship it manages to forge with Europe.

Europe: Model, Partner or Rival

Dmitri Medvedev's current orientation towards Europe remains closely dependent upon the Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin years. However, in the space of twenty years, the balance between norms and power in Moscow's attitude has changed considerably—indeed it has reversed. Anxious to incorporate European standards at the start of the 1990s, Russia now defends a traditional power mindset: contesting the normative power of the EU and aspiring to create alternative options. Traditionally seen as essentially pragmatic, Russian policy vis-à-vis Europe today is highly ideological. Russia pursues a consistent strategy in presenting itself as a "normal country" whose political practices resemble those of the West. Above all, this insistence on being seen as a normal country enables it to claim that there is no need whatsoever to have standards imposed upon it by others, and especially not by Europe.¹ During the 2000s, Russia's ideological corpus was reconfigured to provide a store of antibodies enabling it to resist external influences and then to give Russia agency in its external environment.

A desirable model

At the end of the Soviet period, "new thinking" (*novoe myshlenie*) was encouraged by Mikhail Gorbachev to back up the following policy changes: opening up to the world; arms reductions; withdrawal from Afghanistan; retreat from satellite states; affirming democratic principles; and respecting human rights. This "new thinking" provided the conceptual framework for a move from a military superpower—in which all resources were allocated to the military—to a more reasonable power, that is one that renounces imperialism and normalizes its internal functions, as well as its relations with others. This historic mutation was carried out through convergence with the West in general and Europe in particular.² An important point that is often avoided is that Gorbachev's project was never a renunciation of socialism but a collective re-founding based on the respect of the

¹ A. Makarychev, "Rebranding Russia: Norms, Politics and Power," CEPS Working Document, No. 283, February 2008, p. 29-30.

² R. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 5.

rights of individuals. In this sense, Gorbachev was directly inspired by the European social democrat model and the principle of the welfare state.

In the minds of the Russian elite, the "transition" period of the 1990s remains associated with a period of internal disillusionment and external demotion. It led to the successful implementation of a market economy—at high social cost—but the failure of democracy: the former succeeded because of the clear vision of the team led by Egor Gaidar, while the latter failed because of the lack of such a vision.³ This turn was the result of a politico-economic understanding inspired more by the liberal Anglo-Saxon model of deregulation than by the continental model of the welfare state.⁴ The aim, then, was explicitly to depoliticize economic life. During the first phase of the transition, the leadership still regarded democracy and market economics as being inseparable. Andrey Kozyrev's foreign policy sought to make Russia both a democracy owing to its new political culture and a great power owing to the continuity of its strategic culture.

Russia's relations with Europe were altered profoundly by its inability to find an institutional balance between the Presidency and the Parliament which, from 1993, marked out the limits of political conversion, and by the first war in Chechnya. Indeed, this war is seen in Europe as an expression of Russian militarism, neo-imperialist tendencies, and disregard for human rights. On the Russian side, this war was seen as a fight for the survival of the Russian Federation, which had peacefully renounced its empire several years before. At the same time, the US—supported by European capitals—encouraged the enlargement of NATO. This fuelled the obsessive fear of the Russian elite, whose strategic culture is based on the dread of encirclement and the defense of strategic depth. The perspective of enlargement (of both NATO and the EU) exerts a major power of attraction upon Moscow's former satellites, which want to rejoin transatlantic Europe precisely to gain independence from Russian influence. Periodically, the US studies the installation of anti-missile systems, regarded by Russia as a direct threat to the credibility of its nuclear deterrent. The US encourages an energy policy aiming to by-pass Russian territory. The accumulation of disagreements and diplomatic setbacks has led to a deep sense of frustration and denigration among the Russian elite—a sense that reached its peak in 1999 over Kosovo. At this point, they became aware of Russia's strategic marginalization and the need to rethink their security policy.⁵ The reunification of the European continent had

³ A. Åslund, *Russia's Capitalist Revolution*, Washington, Peterson Institute, 2007, p. 6-7.

⁴ Interview with Egor Gaidar, December 2006.

⁵ V. Baranovsky, "The Kosovo Factor in Russia's Foreign Policy," *International Spectator*, Vol. 35, No. 2, April-June 2000, p. 113-130.

been achieved without them. Kosovo resulted in their being united in opposition to NATO which, under the guise of defending democratic values, promoted its security interests and imposed its order in Europe.⁶ On a much deeper level, the cold war settlement, built on a shared vision between Russian and Western leaders, has become gradually more tense and rivalrous.⁷

An unavoidable partner

This reversal should not be allowed to obscure one strong trend in relations with the EU: the continuous development of economic trade. Today, the EU accounts for more than 55 percent of Russia's external trade. Moscow cannot simply turn away from Europe if it wants to continue developing economically. There is a correlation of Russia's strong growth during the Putin years (registering a 55 percent rise in GDP between 2000 and 2008) with the intensification of relations with the EU. In 2008, EU exports to Russia totaled 105 billion euros, while Russia's exports to the EU totaled 172 billion euros. By way of comparison, Ukraine's exports to Russia totaled 10 billion euros, while Russia's exports to Ukraine totaled 17 billion euros. These general figures should not hide the regional disparities between Member States in their trade with Moscow. In 2007, Russia's balance of trade showed a trade surplus with 21 of the 27 Member States and a trade deficit with the following six countries: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Malta, Austria and Slovenia. In terms of investments, Russia operates mainly in Europe and within the European part of the Community of Independent States (CIS): in 2008, Belarus absorbed 58% of Russian investments within the CIS, followed by Ukraine at 23%. In the first quarter of 2009, Russia's international investments targeted the following countries in descending order: Cyprus, the Netherlands, the US, the UK, Belarus, the Virgin Islands, Switzerland, Gibraltar, Germany and Ukraine. Two trends must be highlighted: on the one hand, some of these investments are encouraged by Russian authorities in order to accompany the internationalization of major groups; on the other hand, these investments demonstrate shareholders' concerns over their exposure to risk on their own market and look like tax evasion.⁸ Overall, the orientation of Russia's financial flows reinforces its anchorage to Europe.

The ties with Europe are often reduced to energy. Seen from the outside, Russia apparently politicizes energy supplies to make

⁶ D. Averre, "From Pristina to Tskhinvali: the Legacy of Operation Allied Force in Russia's Relations with the West," *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3, 2009, p. 575.

⁷ D. Deudney and J. Ikenberry, "The Unravelling of the Cold War Settlement," *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, December 2009-January 2010, p. 48-49.

⁸ A. Panibratov and K. Kalotay, "Russian Outward FDI and its Policy Context," *Columbia FDI Profiles*, No. 1, October 2009.

Europe dependent upon it: thus Moscow has succeeded in stopping NATO enlargement owing to its privileged energy ties with Berlin, Paris and Rome.⁹ The situation is obviously a bit more complex, and it seems too easy to establish a direct link between long-term gas agreements and a diplomatic position in NATO. Nevertheless, in 2007, the EU imported 251 bcm (billion cubic meters) of natural gas: 123 from Russia, 85 from Norway, 32 from Algeria and 9 from Libya. In 2008, Germany (40 bcm), Italy (25 bcm) and France (10 bcm) accounted for 60 percent of Russian gas imports in Europe. The Russian authorities and Gazprom make no secret of the vital nature of gas exports on the European market which remain an essential source of income for the Russian economy and for the current running of its politico-economic economy. From a political perspective, an influential grouping defends a pan-European approach, using energy resources to cement a Euro-Russian understanding.¹⁰ From an industrial perspective, Russia's gas strategy must adapt to the diversification effort led by the Europeans and to the rise in power of non-conventional gas in the US and probably in some European countries. Moscow must maintain its export volumes at a time when its traditional fields are declining, forcing it to start a new phase of exploration-production. In addition, Gazprom's desire to climb up the value chain by making downstream investments is forcing the Russian monopoly to rethink its economic model in terms of partnerships with European energy groups but also the position of the other Russian energy groups wanting to develop on the gas market. Drawing a parallel between the political and industrial aspects again puts Europe at the heart of Russia's energy strategy for the years to come.

A political rival

The realization of an EU-Russia partnership is limited immediately by the visa regime. An obstacle to the development of human exchanges, by itself it symbolizes the existence of two spheres and two models on the European continent. On a much deeper level, this coexistence is apparently changing in nature. Taking note of Europe's difficulty in becoming an international player, Russia is seeking to promote an alternative vision to the idea of Europe. Russia considers that the very idea of what is European has been monopolized by the

⁹ K. Smith, "Russia-Europe Energy Relations, Implications for US Policy," Washington, CSIS, February 2010, p. 1.

¹⁰ M. Margelov, "A Strategic Union with Europe Based on an Energy Union," *Russian Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 18 February 2010, p. 11.

EU, which would then give it the right to define the contours of European identity.¹¹

From this point of view, a turning point occurred during Putin's first mandate. His desire to move closer to the EU was clearly expressed during his first trips abroad, particularly to France in October 2000. However, this orientation was soon exhausted by the combined effect of several factors, such as the disagreement over Kaliningrad in 2002.¹² The Iraq war showed deep divisions among the European states, discredited the EU and opened up diplomatic space for a Russia trying to regain its self-confidence. The double enlargement of 2004 took place in a context of internal stability with the re-election of Putin and increased power, a result of the deteriorating situation in Iraq and soaring global energy prices. In addition to this are two major ruptures: the trauma of Beslan¹³—underestimated in Europe, which saw it only as an avatar of the war in Chechnya—and the "Orange revolution" in Ukraine.

The combination of these events alters Russia's outlook not only towards Europe but particularly towards the US. As Russia regained power and the capability to exert influence, Washington once more became central to Russia's foreign policy. This was demonstrated very directly by Moscow's attitude towards the EU, which quickly lost its political credibility. The EU did manage to exist as a diplomatic player by mediating in the Russo-Georgian conflict. However, Moscow rejects its pretensions to transform the countries covered by the Eastern Partnership and intends to preserve its "sphere of privileged interests." During the war in Georgia, Moscow broke taboo, by resorting to force in defense of its interests outside the Federation's borders. It was an explicit message that changed the tone of its policy with regard to Europe.

At the same time, Moscow has elaborated arguments contesting both the political and economic aspects of the EU model, often described as a soft and indecisive bureaucracy. However, this tendency faded away with the effects of the recession in Russia (8.5 percent decline in GDP in 2009) and the need to progress in view of the New Agreement, which should serve as the legal basis for exchanges between the two. The Russian elite promote the principles

¹¹ R. Sakwa, "The Outsiders: Russia, Turkey, and Greater Europe," *Russie.Nei. Visions*, forthcoming, 2010.

¹² T. Bordachev, *Novyi strategicheskii soyuz. Rossiya i Evropa pered vyzovami XXI veka: vozmozhnosti 'bolshoi sdelki'* [A new Strategic Alliance. Russia and Europe against the challenges of the XXIst Century. Possibilities for a 'Grand Bargain'], Moscow, Evropa Editions, 2009, p. 76-93.

¹³ Editor's note: In September 2004, over one thousand people were taken hostage in a school in Beslan, North Ossetia. After an assault by government forces, the official outcome was 331 dead, including 172 children. Responsibility was claimed by Shamil Basaev, leader of the radical Chechen separatist movement.

of "state capitalism," evoking the virtues of economic growth based on tight political control. With notable subtle differences, the Russian elite reject more and more openly the equation between a market economy and political democratization. During the negotiations, they work to deconstruct the idea of norms as presented by the EU and to contest the latter's monopoly on the definition of democracy by arguing that all notions are the product of a "specific" approach.¹⁴ It is a matter of both defending standardization with regard to universal values to avoid being subjected to conversion and, at the same time, of not feeling responsible for these universal values. The pragmatic, technocratic and expert approach in reality hides concern, not of gradually absorbing European standards but, on the contrary, a desire to discuss the drawing up of standards on a case by case basis. Russia follows a relativist mindset, enabling it to denounce "double standards" and to undermine the symbolic capital of Europe.

This ideological framework leads to the question whether Europe has become an idea of the past.¹⁵ Yet, on this point, it seems that Russian policy towards Europe is related to a generational phenomenon. We should not draw definitive conclusions from opinion polls that are, by definition, temporal; but it seems that the European model has dramatically lost appeal over the last ten years. The upcoming generation (aged 20-30 years) is far less drawn to the West than the previous generation (aged 40-50 years). In becoming rich to undreamed-of proportions with regard to their situation at the start of the 1990s, the Russian population has not been Westernized. In sociological terms, they reject the socio-political model of the West but adopt an ever more individualistic mode of conduct. In 2008, 50 percent of Russians responded no to the question of whether Western society was a good model for Russia (25 percent said yes). This does not indicate the return of *homo sovieticus* but, on the contrary, to a fairly simplistic capitalist mode of conduct: in their everyday lives, Russians believe more in the opportunities offered and the threats posed by capitalism than Europeans.

¹⁴ A. Makarychev, *op. cit.* [1].

¹⁵ A. Áslund and A. Kuchins, *The Russia Balance Sheet*, Washington, Peterson Institute/CSIS, 2009, p. 99-114. Figures and analysis in this paragraph come from this source.

Europe: Neither Central, nor Marginal

In practice, Europe occupies a central place in Russia's economy. Russia's security system is also still broadly directed towards Europe, even though the origin of threats is in the process of shifting. Yet, in the discourse of the Russian elite, Europe's place is reducing owing to Europe's loss of influence and Russia's desire to appear as an emerging power with global potential.

Threat perceptions: defensive logic and offensive logic

In Russian strategic culture, threats come mainly from the West. Russia often portrays itself as a politico-military organization having resisted Western influences.¹⁶ As a possible temporal and spiritual alternative, Russia has always felt more threatened by heretics than by infidels.¹⁷ This heritage cannot be overcome in a few years but explains the impossibility of a linear progression towards the West. In official doctrine, threat analysis is still focused on NATO, the enlargement of which was deemed destabilizing and aggressive.¹⁸ The dread of being encircled by the West moulds the representations of the Russian military as they fear the reach of NATO's forces, capable of striking Russia at its heart. This threat system allows for the maintenance of massive military resources and a political order that prioritizes internal and external security. The current readjustment of civil-military relations to the benefit of political leadership deserves particular attention.¹⁹ The main effect should be to redistribute responsibilities within the chain of command, especially in terms of strategic planning. This should alter the relative

¹⁶ M. Poe, *The Russian Moment in World History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003.

¹⁷ J. Garrard & C. Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 141.

¹⁸ T. Gomart, "NATO-Russia: Is the 'Russian Question' European?" *Politique étrangère* (English edition), No. 4, 2009, p. 123-136.

¹⁹ T. Gomart, "Russian Civil-Military Relations: Is there something new with Medvedev?" Carlisle PA, US Army War College, forthcoming.

importance granted to Europe with regard to transnational threats and the rise in power of Iran and China.

The Kremlin's efforts to promote the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) are bound up with its efforts to impose the principle of a "sphere of privileged interests." Moscow is following a threefold objective with this alliance system whose operational coherence remains to be tested. It is seeking to obtain a system of outposts to prolong its tradition of establishing buffer zones; to exert a form of military domination—"on demand" rather than on a permanent basis—over its neighborhood; and, ultimately, to garner power in the Caucasus and Central Asia to better influence Europe and the US. To achieve the first objective, Moscow is working to consolidate bilateral relations, in an ad hoc manner, with Belarus in Europe, Armenia in the Caucasus and Kazakhstan in Central Asia. To attain the second objective, Moscow is modernizing its military in light of operational lessons drawn from the war in Georgia.²⁰ For the third objective, Russia is trying to establish equivalence between the CSTO and NATO. Moscow wants to fully promote its influence in central Asia in its dialogue with NATO, which is looking for a political solution in its military engagement in Afghanistan.

In addition to this rationale, which is basically a territorial vision aimed at preserving Russia's strategic autonomy, is an offensive logic that seeks to globalize Russia's presence. Having understood the changes in the international system, Russia endeavors to project its power in geostrategic terms. It is not restricting its ambitions to territorial control—direct or indirect—but is seeking to embed itself in global flows and, where possible, to harness those within its reach. Energy is clearly the favored means of globalizing its presence. This is part of its approach to gas supplies but is also part of its desire to climb up the value chain of the oil, coal and civil nuclear industries while supporting national companies in their efforts at internalization. The Russian authorities are betting on the growing shortage of fossil fuels opening a window of opportunity for rapid enrichment and global influence. This directly concerns Europe, where energy needs are expected to increase significantly in the coming years. The aim is definitely not to limit itself to the European market but to limit competition, especially for gas, on this natural market.

The offensive mindset to exert global influence also includes arms sales. Russia has three main clients: India, China and Iran. In addition, Russia sells weapons systems to Syria, Venezuela and Algeria. As well as financial income that is indispensable for the modernization of its defense industry, these sales mark out an

²⁰ R. McDermott, "Russia's Conventional Armed Forces and the Georgian War," *Parameters*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, 2009, p. 67-68.

intermediary diplomatic space which is useful in the framework of its policy towards Europe.

Europe in a transatlantic framework

It can scarcely be doubted that NATO remains the reference point for Russia, which results in its pursuing a specific policy vis-à-vis countries that do not belong to both the EU and NATO, such as Sweden, Finland, Norway and Turkey. The desire to undermine Western cohesion by playing on the link between the US and Europe is a constant in Moscow's foreign policy, which favors bilateral channels over institutional links. From this viewpoint, France's return to NATO's integrated structures (April 2009) was interpreted by Moscow as the swan song of European strategic autonomy, despite the arguments of French authorities over the constitution of a European pillar within the Alliance. From this perspective, the impact of the "Orange revolution" must be highlighted. It was interpreted by the Russian elite as the fruit of a Western desire to attract Ukraine into its orbit, but also as a revolution instigated by the US, with the intention of spreading it to Russia.²¹ This serves to highlight the highly sensitive position of Ukraine in Russian policy vis-à-vis Europe and the US. Its malleability and role in the transit of energy means that Ukraine remains one of Moscow's priorities: the election of Viktor Yanukovich should ease Moscow's apprehensions, even if major issues such as the status of the Russian Black Sea Fleet still need to be settled.²² With regard to NATO, there are several movements within the Russian elite.²³ The first group believes that Russia and NATO could reach an agreement over a balance that would preserve their respective spheres of influence. The second movement—very much in the minority—still envisages Russia's NATO membership and adherence to Western values. The third movement, which is very active in parliamentary circles, believes that, in spite of everything, NATO is continuing to prepare an invasion of Russia.

Russia-NATO relations depend on the development of Russo-American relations. Shaped by the cold war, these relations remain

²¹ D. Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, not Influence," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2009, p. 15.

²² On 21 April 2010, Presidents Medvedev and Yanukovich concluded an agreement linking the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet to the price of Russian gas exports to Ukraine. The Russian presence in Sevastopol was prolonged for another 25 to 30 years. In exchange, Russia has promised Ukraine reduced gas export tariffs for a period of ten years.

²³ R. Allison, "Russian Security Engagement with NATO," in R. Allison, M. Light, and S. White, *Putin's Russia and the Enlarged Europe*, London, Blackwell, Chatham House Papers, 2006, p. 99-105.

founded upon nuclear dialogue.²⁴ The importance Moscow places upon its dialogue with Washington is explained by the primacy of nuclear arms as an element of international legitimacy. During Putin's second mandate, Moscow developed a strong anti-American stance, while still seeking systematically for signs of recognition from Washington in order to reinforce its strategic weight, in particular in the eyes of the Europeans. Nuclear arms, the heritage of the cold war, directly determine the orientation of Russia's security policy. It is the nuclear arsenal that gives it military credibility as well as the ultimate attribute of global power. At the same time, the Russian elite are perfectly aware of the change in the paradigm of global security since the end of the Soviet period. Nevertheless, Russia has opted for a sort of strategic solitude, judging that, in the current context, its survival and development are guaranteed by its nuclear autonomy and its energy potential; neither one nor the other encourage it to form restrictive partnerships.

This is the context in which Obama's administration launched the *reset*, that is, its new policy aimed at engaging Russia on strategic matters, and seeking to create specific points of convergence on dossiers such as Iran and Afghanistan. The heritage of the Bush administration limits the Obama administration's room for maneuver.²⁵ This opening arouses skepticism in Moscow but makes sustained exchanges over sensitive dossiers possible. Although still ambivalent, Russia's position on the Iran issue has toughened since September 2009. Moscow responded both diplomatically and ideologically to US policy in its zone of influence. Another interpretation sees the heart of Putin's foreign policy in Russian anti-Americanism, well before his speech in Munich in 2007.²⁶ With regard to the US and Europe alike, the key issue of Russian policy lies in the affirmation of its strategic autonomy. Moscow believes that the Europeans are allowing themselves to fall behind militarily, while the US could opt for isolationism at the end of its Iraqi and Afghan adventures. In this perspective, the challenge for Russia is to sustain a competitive position vis-à-vis the US and China—a costly endeavor given its economic potential.²⁷

²⁴ T. Graham, "US-Russia Relations, Facing Reality Pragmatically," in T. Gomart and A. Kuchins, *Europe, Russia, and the US, Finding a New Balance*, Washington/Paris, CSIS/Ifri, July 2008.

²⁵ T. Gomart, "Obama and Russia: Facing the Heritage of the Bush Years," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 39, April 2009.

²⁶ T. Ambrosio, *Challenging America's Global Preeminence, Russia's Quest for Multipolarity*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2005.

²⁷ B. Lo, "Russia, China and the US: From Strategic Triangularism to the Postmodern Triangle," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 47, February 2010.

Other Priorities

In its relations with Europe, Russia exploits the rise in power of emerging countries, a factor to which it refers frequently. Benefiting from the golden opportunity created by the Goldman Sachs' report presenting the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) as economies with strong potential, Russia is exploiting more and more systematically the BRIC "brand."²⁸ According to Goldman Sachs, the BRIC countries represented 15 percent of the economic weight of the G6 countries (Germany, US, France, Italy, Japan and UK) in 2003.²⁹ In 2025, they are expected to represent more than 50 percent and, in 2045, to exceed them. Within this group, Russia is an exception insofar as it would be the only country whose population could achieve the standard of living of the G6, as measured in GDP per capita. At the same time, Russia's assimilation into the BIC countries (Brazil, India and China) is openly contested and is subject to regular controversy in Western media.³⁰ Nevertheless, in its relations with Europe, Russia exploits the topic to give substance to state capitalism, a system in which the state presents itself as a leading economic actor and tries to make political gains via its position on the markets.³¹ In diplomatic terms, Russia organized the first BRIC summit in Yekaterinburg in June 2009; the summit aroused certain skepticism in the West as it primarily offered an international platform to the Iranian President.

In its relations with Europe, Russia instrumentalizes China, which represented 16 percent of EU imports in 2007 (ahead of the US at 13 percent and Russia at 10 percent) and represented 6 percent of EU exports (behind the US at 21 percent, Switzerland at 7 percent and equal with Russia's 6 percent).³² Following the example of China, Russia espouses a double position: it uses the BRIC "brand" on the economic level and its status as a permanent member of the Security Council on the political level. In addition, Russia resorts to symbolic displays of its military power, particularly in its nuclear, naval and space aspects. It alternates between expressions of soft power, as with the preparation of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, and manifestations of hard power, as shown by the war in Georgia. BRIC

²⁸ C. Roberts, "Russia's BRIC Diplomacy: Rising Outsider with Dreams of an Insider," *Polity*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2010, p. 38-73.

²⁹ D. Wilson and R. Purushothaman, "Dreaming With BRICs: The Path to 2050," Goldman Sachs, *Global Economics Paper*, No. 99, October 2003.

³⁰ See for example: N. Roubini, "Quels sont les vrais pays émergents?" [Which are the true emerging countries?], *Les Echos*, 16 November 2009 and in response: K. Hirn and J-M. Laporte, "Eloge de la Russie" [Praise for Russia], *Les Echos*, 9 December 2009.

³¹ I. Bremmer, "State capitalism comes of age: the end of the free market?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 3, May 2009.

³² Eurostat, September 2009.

is a creation mainly intended to show the West the change to the global system's centre of gravity. Debatable on many points, this grouping enables Russia to promote itself and distinguish itself with regard to the EU, which remains, nevertheless, indispensable to the development of the Russian economy. BRIC's relevance lies primarily in the development of Sino-Russian relations, taking into account the difference in the potential of the two countries. On the Western side, the impact of the rapprochement between China and Russia is subject to many evaluations.³³ On the Russian side, the Chinese option is often used to obtain concessions from Western partners in the military, energy and diplomatic fields.

In addition to this effort at global image making, Russia implements specific measures towards certain regions where it has interests to defend, to distinguish itself vis-à-vis the Europeans or even to marginalize them. This is clearly the case in Central Asia, where the EU's economic weight (as the primary foreign investor) does not correspond to its political visibility. This will undoubtedly be the case for the Arctic, which is currently becoming a priority zone for Moscow owing to its richness in fossil fuels; Moscow has had some success in its endeavors to gain the advantage over claims by European countries such as Norway.³⁴ As far as the Middle East is concerned, Russia has been a member of the Quartet (with the EU, the UN and the US) for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 2003. In addition, Russia, the US and Europe (Germany, France and the UK) are cooperating over Iran's nuclear ambitions. Taking into account Russia's close relations with Israel and Russian arms sales to Syria and Iran, Russia remains a major player in the Middle East. By becoming an observer at the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2003, Russia undertook to redraw its relations with political Islam by seeking to distinguish itself from the West. This notably led Moscow to establish official links with Hamas and forge unofficial ones with Hezbollah, while trying to construct an Islam *à la russe* for its Muslim minorities.³⁵ Despite some economic and diplomatic success, Russia's breakthrough in Africa and Latin America seems, on the other hand, relatively limited.³⁶

³³ For an interpretation contesting the idea of a sustainable Sino-Russian alliance, see: B. Lo, *Axis of Convenience, Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*, Washington, Brookings Institute, 2008. For an interpretation highlighting the Chinese role in Russian policy, see: A. Tsygankov, "What Is China to Us? Westernizers and Sinophiles in Russia's Foreign Policy," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 45, December 2009.

³⁴ A. Oreshenkov, "Arctic Diplomacy," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, 2009, p. 121-132.

³⁵ R. Danreuther, "Islamic radicalization in Russia: an assessment," *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 1, p. 111-120.

³⁶ S. Blank, "Russia in Latin America: Geopolitical Games in the US's Neighborhood," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 38, April 2009.

What Place is there for Europe in Russia's Power Project?

A regional power with global pretensions, Russia maintains paradoxical relations with Europe. It is anticipating a geostrategic demotion of the latter even though, beyond the energy sector, the choice of driving forces for its development model makes its own autonomy improbable. It is also seeking to globalize its policies in order to have a greater influence on the orientations of its primary trade partner, Europe. It is possible to identify the major directions of Moscow's power project and to locate Europe's place in it. Russia's aims are to:

- *Preserve its strategic autonomy*: the discourse of the Russian elite is confident; they do not fear the consequences of a "strategic solitude" which, in their eyes, is in line with the historical development of their country with regard to other powers.³⁷ This stance enables them to highlight that European leaders have resigned responsibility for strategic matters, slipping into a post-modern vision of the world even though confrontational opposition is making a comeback. Moscow has developed a vision of a multipolar world—unstable and brutal—which no longer ties up with the European credo. This strategic autonomy must extend to the political and diplomatic levels, transforming Russia into a producer of norms and no longer just a consumer of European norms.

- *Seize the opportunities offered by globalization*: the Russian elite's relation with globalization is based on a fundamental hesitation, visible during several key moments in Russian history.³⁸ Global processes entail profound changes to society, which sooner or later end up affecting the stability of power. This leads authorities to take measures to control change, at the risk of missing new development opportunities. The discourse on modernization developed by Putin renewed by Medvedev is embedded in this vicious circle at a time when the Russian economy has never been so integrated into the global economy. From this perspective, Europe is seen as the most

³⁷ T. Gomart, "Russia Alone Forever? The Kremlin's Strategic Solitude," *Politique étrangère*, Special issue, World Policy Conference, 2008, p. 23-33.

³⁸ C. Wallander, "Global Challenges and Russian Foreign Policy," in R. Levgold, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 444-445.

natural territorial gateway to gain access to the flows of globalization. One of the challenges for Russia in the years to come is to join global flows beyond those relating to energy.

- *Win a symbolic victory*: the Russian elite are trying to get their country's return to power recognized, especially on the European continent. Indeed, for them, the end of the cold war was not a defeat of Moscow but the end of Western domination over world affairs. They experienced the so-called transition years, which corresponded to the enlargements of NATO and the EU, as a period of humiliation during which Russia could only be subjected to decisions taken in a transatlantic context. From this point of view, the addition of the defeat in Chechnya (1994-1996), NATO's intervention in Kosovo (1999) and the sinking of the Kursk submarine (2000) profoundly altered the Russian elite's perception of the country's military prestige. For Vladimir Putin as for Dmitry Medvedev, the challenge became a matter of restoring it both on an internal level, with the second campaign in Chechnya (1999-2008), and on the external level, with the war in Georgia. Owing to its strategic culture, resorting to force remains Russia's preferred method to command respect on the international stage, firstly in the Caucasus and secondly in Europe.

These three global objectives form a corpus largely shared by the Russian elite, who continue to conceive their country as a traditional great power. This leads them to follow three operational objectives that are currently at the heart of Moscow's diplomatic activities. These are to:

- *Maintain US-Russian nuclear supremacy*: the delicate negotiations of the new START treaty are at the heart of Russo-American discussions. These negotiations go beyond this bilateral framework insofar as they touch on the hard core of Russia's international identity. Russia still considers its nuclear arsenal as not only the ultimate guarantee of its security but also the essential attribute of its status as a world power. Negotiating over nuclear weapons is the preferred method for maintaining special relations with the US and hence for distinguishing itself vis-à-vis other nuclear powers.

- *Limit the loss of power*: the rise in power of China and India, together with the institutionalization of the G20, reduces the influence of a Russia belonging to the G8 without being a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In some regions of the world, especially in the Middle East, Russia takes care to distinguish itself from the Western policy line. In its immediate neighborhood, it seeks to reinforce its influence by benefiting from the economic crisis to take back shares in various businesses (particularly in Belarus and Ukraine), by exploiting its command of the information space in the Russian language and by recalling its military dominance. This could lead Russia to overexploit its central position in the energy field,

insofar as this position is generating immediate revenue and global influence.

- *Neutralize Ukraine and marginalize Georgia.* Moscow's hostility towards the enlargement of NATO has engendered a clear objective since 2004: to stop NATO enlargement in Russia's immediate neighborhood. This objective has been attained at the current time. To consolidate this temporary success, Russia will have to work to neutralize Ukraine, that is, leave it to move closer to the EU once it has renounced joining NATO. The future of Sebastopol is still a great unknown, but will be decisive for Moscow's continued naval domination in the Black Sea. As far as Georgia is concerned, Moscow's aim is to secure Abkhazia and Ossetia ahead of the Olympic Games in Sochi which should, according to Russian authorities, have positive effects for Russia. However, the games could also spark off orchestrated disputes over the nature of Russia's presence in the South Caucasus.

To conclude, Russia's foreign policy with regard to Europe is indisputably more active today than it was at the start of the 2000s. Its normative approach to Europe has been transformed by the combined effect of two factors: the loss of influence of an EU that is enlarged but divided over crucial dossiers such as Iraq, and the regain of Moscow's power thanks to its strong economic growth from 2000 to 2008. Moscow now wants to obtain tangible results from this modification in the balance of power, even though its interdependence with the EU has been reinforced over the course of the last decade. To achieve these results, Russia has committed itself to a series of parallel negotiations: Medvedev's initiative launched in May 2008; the OSCE Corfu process; the Belarus-Russia-Kazakhstan customs union; a new contractual agreement with the EU; the Geneva process on Georgia; and the new START treaty with the US. This multiplication of diplomatic initiatives is the expression of a dogma shared by the Russian elite: the advent of a multipolar and interdependent world justifies the maintenance of strategic autonomy.