



## NATO should set Limits on Russia's Actions in the East

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The events leading to Crimea's secession from Ukraine are not a series of ad-hoc moves, but part of a calculated plan by Russia's leaders that fits Alexander Dugin's vision of 'Eurasianism'. Accordingly, Russia is determined to follow its own Eurasian path, while the real goal of Eurasianism is the formation of a new political integration bloc. The European Union (EU) and NATO response must set limits on Russia.

### A Retrospective View

Following the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) did not disappear as did the Warsaw Pact. On the contrary, NATO grew in size and depth, welcoming former Soviet republics, such as the Baltic states, as members. As a result, in 1999 NATO changed its strategic concept, and the scope of NATO interventions expanded to remote 65°E and 70°E meridians of Afghanistan. In 2002, the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council reinforced the relationship between NATO and Russia. Later, at the November 2010 Lisbon Summit, NATO's new Strategic Concept was published in response to the changing international security environment. This "Active Engagement, Modern Defense" concept reaffirmed the importance of strategic cooperation with Russia, and it strengthened the political consultations and practical NATO-Russia cooperation. The world has undergone radical change since the Cold War. In the

1980s, who would have thought that NATO and Russia would be partners?

However, almost all of this happened in a period of Russian economic weakness and political disorientation. After President Boris Yeltsin's 1999 resignation, Vladimir Putin, a former KGB agent, took over control of Russia. Putin's presidency coincided with an outstanding economic recovery<sup>1</sup> and soon Russia re-emerged as an economic and energy superpower. Yet nostalgia proved irresistible in 2014, when Vladimir Putin demonstrated that he had been living in the Cold War era. Russia's new economic capacity permitted an increase in military spending. The political posture of the Russian leadership changed as well, as evidenced by Putin's Munich speech in February 2007 and the 2008 Georgia war. Thus, Russia's agenda clashed anew with NATO enlargement, which from 1999 to 2004 grew to include Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Thus, Russian concerns over NATO resurfaced.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the 2010 Russian Federation Military Doctrine expressed disapproval of NATO Eastern expansion and listed NATO as an external threat.<sup>3</sup>

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1 International Monetary Fund, "Russia - Gross Domestic Product, constant prices" (IMF, *World Economic Outlook*, October 2013).

2 Vladimir Putin, "Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following a Meeting of the Russia-NATO Council" (President of Russia, 4 April 2008).

3 Dmitry Medvedev, "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" (President of Russia, 5 February 2010).



## A Russian Spring?

Russia's subsequent actions indicate that Moscow has devised a new strategy aimed at the restoration of Russia's past glory. Some preparatory steps along this route, including Russia's exit from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, should have been viewed as a tactical move rather than diplomatic protest.<sup>4</sup> Such steps are consistent with a realization of a general assertive Russian strategy that paved the way to war with Georgia in 2008. In fact, Russian hawks were convinced after the intervention in Georgia that they had found a way to prevent further NATO enlargement.<sup>5</sup> President Dmitry Medvedev's statements in November 2011 echo that conviction.<sup>6</sup> The naval base in Gudauta, Abkhazia, and Russia's "Sevastopol agreements" with Ukraine, which extended the Black Sea Fleet lease until 2042, advanced Russia's military doctrine and also contained NATO. NATO cannot grant membership to a country hosting a non-member military base on its territory. So far, Russia's strategy has worked: neither Ukraine nor Georgia has joined NATO since Russia invaded them.

Crimea's secession from Ukraine and inclusion into the Russian Federation may be seen as a continuation of the same strategy. Earlier this year, when Putin realized that Viktor Yanukovich was going to be impeached by the Ukrainian Parliament and that Ukraine would not join the Eurasian Customs Union, Putin responded according to the script he used with Georgia in 2008, the only difference being that Crimea requested formal inclusion in the Russian Federation. On March 18 the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation was signed.<sup>7</sup>

Seen from this perspective, Viktor Yanukovich's call for

Russia does not have a high opinion of the European Union on defense and security issues, not only due to the EU's lack of competence in this area but also because the EU is no match to Russia in military terms. Moreover, aware of its energy predominance over Europe, Russia favors bilateral negotiations with the EU member states.

a referendum towards a 'federalization' of Ukraine is just an act in Vladimir Putin's screenplay. The fact that the city of Donetsk<sup>8</sup> and Eastern Ukraine<sup>9</sup> are already being targeted confirms that Russia likely is not going to stop. Furthermore, Odessa may follow the same path.<sup>10</sup> Observing these events, one must assume that the most likely scenario is the creation of a new Eastern bloc of satellite states headed by Moscow. Having in mind both the psychological profile of the current Russian leaders, particularly Vladimir Putin, and the sequence in the evolution of Russia with the West, tiny regions like Transnistria<sup>11</sup> or Gagauzia<sup>12</sup> are going to be disputed, as well.

## Friends or Foes?

Russia does not have a high opinion of the European Union on defense and security issues, not only due to the EU's lack of competence in this area but also because the EU is no match to Russia in military terms. Moreover, aware of its energy predomi-

nance over Europe, Russia favors bilateral negotiations with the EU member states. In addition, Russia not only challenged but also rejected EU's most fundamental feature, its normative power or "Model Power Europe".<sup>13</sup> In fact, Russia was able to promote Europeanization from the East by reversing the political conditionality and asymmetry within the EU-Russia relation.<sup>14</sup> Concerning

4 Yuri Zarakovich, "Why Putin Pulled Out of a Key Treaty" (*Time*, 14 July 2007).

5 Denis Dyomin, "Russia says Georgia war stopped NATO expansion" (*Reuters*, 21 November 2008).

6 Dmitry Astahov, "Russia's 2008 war with Georgia prevented NATO growth - Medvedev" (*Ria Novosti*, 21 November 2011).

7 Bridget Kendall, "Crimea crisis: Russian President Putin's speech annotated" (*BBC News*, 19 March 2014).

8 Maria Finoshina, "Eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk rallies in favor of independence referendum" (*RT*, 5 April 2014).

9 "Ukraine crisis: What is happening where?" (*BBC News*, 14 April 2014).

10 Anastasia Vlasova and Oksana Grytsenko, "Ukrainian nationalists, pro-Russian separatists stage rival rallies in Odessa" (*KyivPost*, 6 April 2014).

11 Christian Oliver, "Tiny Transnistria becomes the frontline in east-west struggle" (*Financial Times*, 4 April 2014).

12 Tiago Ferreira Lopes, "Post-soviet Unfrozen Dilemmas: Profiling Gagauzia" (*State Building and Fragility Monitor*, No. 7, March 2014).

13 Laura Ferreira-Pereira, "The European Union as a 'Model Power': Spreading Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in the Wider World", in Federiga Bindi (ed.), *The European Union Foreign Policy: Assessing Europe's Role in the World* (Brookings Institution Press, 2012).

14 Alena Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira, "The many patterns of Europeanization: European Union Relations with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus", in Teresa Cierco (ed.), *The European Union Neighborhood. Challenges and Opportunities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).



Ukraine, EU actions were disappointing, to say the least. However, this is not surprising: EU action parallels what happened during and after the 2008 Georgia war. Back then, the Extraordinary European Council suspended negotiations with Russia until Russian troops' withdrawal from Georgia. Talks resumed, notwithstanding the fact that the Russian troops had not withdrawn. Given the fact that the EU did not ponder political alternatives to these actions, the inevitable question arises about what the EU cherishes most, its energy or its values.<sup>15</sup>

For its part, NATO decided to suspend cooperation with Russia, but Russia's leadership does not seem too offended. Alexander Lukashевич, Russia's foreign ministry spokesman, recalled that this is not the first time such a gesture was assumed by the West and that after Russia's war with Georgia NATO-Russia military cooperation resumed.<sup>16</sup> But while Russia is not worried about the interruption of a dialogue with NATO, Moscow does fear the integration of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO. Thus far, Western sanctions do not seem to have had an effect on the Kremlin strategy.<sup>17</sup> Quite the contrary.<sup>18</sup> Hence, if "freezing assets" is not an issue for Russians, what is? The Kremlin propaganda at the same time does its best to discredit any proactive policy by the West towards Crimea. According to the notorious Director General of the Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, Dmitry Kiselev, even the present response of the West, restrained though it is, deserves the following label: "Western behavior borders on schizophrenia".<sup>19</sup>

15 Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions on Ukraine" (European Union, 20/21 March 2014).

16 Timothy Heritage, "Russia says NATO reverts to Cold War-era mindset" (Reuters, 2 April 2014).

17 "Russian Deputy PM Plays Down Western Sanctions" (Ria Novosti, 15 March 2014).

18 Igor Ivanov, "Western Sanctions Are a Sign of Weakness" (The Moscow Times, 27 March 2014).

19 "Western behavior borders on schizophrenia" (Ria Novosti, 5 April 2014).

### **Boldness: Unexpected and Necessary**

None of the three countries that are victims of Russia's actual or potential separatist policy – Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova – can join NATO or the EU with a 'pending' territorial conflict with a neighbor. Therefore, the cost of their accession may well be giving up a part of their country. If these states are willing to pay such high price, NATO must welcome them as members as soon as possible.

NATO members? After all, if we are before a *novum frigus bellum* we know it will not be the same as the previous Cold War. The division lines are already different, perhaps to a higher degree than is commonly thought. Any move that checks Russia's influence is welcome.<sup>22</sup> Already some positive signs that could be the necessary precondition for such actions are appearing. NATO Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, has stated that "Russia's military aggression in Ukraine is in blatant

20 Joshua Kucera, "Ivanishvili: We Will Get NATO MAP in 2014" (Eurasianet.org, 2 May 2013).

21 Nicu Popescu, "After Crimea: Putin's Balance Sheet" (EUISS, Issue Alert No. 24, 4 April 2014); Giorgi Menabde, "Kremlin's Followers in Georgia Become Active" (The Jamestown Foundation, 3 April 2014).

22 "Eurasian Economic Union Treaty Could Be Signed by May" (Ria Novosti, 3 April 2014).



breach of its international commitments and it is a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity".<sup>23</sup> In Athens on April 5, Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt stated that the EU "should be very firm on international law and the rules that must apply". Referring to the banner "Crimea is in my heart" placed behind Vladimir Putin during a rally last month, Bildt went further noting that we should wonder what else Putin cares about.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, one must ask what is going to be the cost of the resurgence of Russian greatness, and how far Russia's leadership might go. However, we know one thing already: any sign of hesitation from the West will be interpreted by Moscow as a license to proceed with Russia's previous course. Presently, Russia is well ahead in the triggering of events. Should the EU and especially NATO conform? Now is the time for decision. Deciding according to convenience means a loss of credibility. It also shows a marked lack of values. EU countries must show cohesion and speak with a single voice. NATO must act according to its essential purpose. A refocusing and 'returning' to Europe on the part of NATO, rather than a stubborn maintenance of the "Asian pivot", is wise. And taking a stand against Russia confirms NATO's *raison d'être*.

23 Fred Dews, "NATO Secretary-General: Russia's Annexation of Crimea Is Illegal and Illegitimate" (*Brookings Now*, 19 March 2014).

24 Demetris Nellas, "EU Working With Russia, Ukraine to Defuse Crisis" (*Associated Press*, 5 April 2014).

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