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"Helsinki 2" and the reform
of Euro-Atlantic Security*

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The week commencing the 1st December is symbolically very important. NATO has agreed to resume its relations with Russia, albeit it in a "conditional and graduated" re-engagement. The EU has recommenced its negotiations with Russia on preparing a new Partnership Agreement. And the OSCE will hold a Ministerial Council in Helsinki, the key focus of which will be Russia's ideas for a reconsideration of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture to be discussed by Foreign Ministers over lunch on the 4th.

In his speech in Berlin on 5 June, President Medvedev explicitly proposed a reconsideration of the current European security architecture and the development of a new European Security Treaty. Since then, Moscow has made a concerted effort to advance this idea, both in multilateral formats including the UN and the EU, and bilaterally with specific partner states. Key points in this process have been Medvedev's speech in Evian on 8 October (which some Russian commentators equate with Vladimir Putin's speech to the Munich Security Conference in February 2007) and the EU-Russia summit held in Nice on 14th November.

Yet the OSCE Ministerial Council offers the biggest audience so far for discussing these ideas, both given the large number of Foreign Ministers attending (some 50 will be present) and in range of states attending the meeting, including states from the Former Soviet Union. Indeed, moreover, the OSCE Ministerial Council is an important step to agreeing the first "real" stage of this process, providing as it does an opportunity to work towards an OSCE Summit proposed and agreed by Presidents Medvedev and Sarkozy during their meeting in Evian.² The proposed date for the Summit – which would be the first OSCE summit since Istanbul in 1999 – is 2009.

Moscow's ideas for a reconsideration of the European architecture are couched in broader Russian foreign policy thinking, which sees diminishing US global influence and the rise of other international "poles" in an increasingly competitive international environment. The ideas are also based on what Moscow perceives to be the self-evident failure of the current institutional architecture in Europe. This failure, according to Moscow, was again highlighted by the conflict that erupted in the Caucasus in August. Not only are the current institutions unable to meet the requirements of the 21st century, they contribute to the problem by creating an ideologically exclusive bloc framework and consequently a multi-tier security system in Europe which isolates some states on ideological grounds. As Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has stated, Moscow believes that the time is "ripe for a major restructuring of the European security architecture and its modernisation in accordance with requirements of our time".

The overall concept, therefore, is to bring all the states in the Euro-Atlantic region together on an equal basis to establish a legally binding, inclusive and cooperative

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² Both Presidents claim the initiative for this proposal and acknowledge the support of the other.

framework – essentially, as Ambassador Rogozin has suggested, to form a demilitarised zone in the Euro-Atlantic area (“big Europe”), then build a perimeter around it.

Moscow presents its ideas as a reconsideration of the CSCE/Helsinki Final Act of 1975. Through this prism, Medvedev has announced 5 principles which form the basis of Moscow’s proposals, and within this, “3 nos” (see Annex I). Moscow has circulated 3 page proposals to some partners (though apparently not yet to all those states and organisations that would participate in the Summit/new Treaty process), and has received positive and supportive responses from several European states, particularly Italy, Spain and France.³ Other states have been more guarded in their response so far, not least because the specifics of these ideas, and how Moscow seeks practically to realise its ideas, remain unclear.

The lack of detail should not be taken as an indication that Moscow is not serious about these ideas. They appear to have been under consideration for some time, building as they do on previous proposals, and are being implemented by an experienced team. Significantly, also, they are an important element of Dmitri Medvedev’s own adopted political agenda, giving him a vested interest in seeking results. Moscow also seeks to spread the burden of effort: in consulting partner capitals, and, by launching the initial ideas, Moscow now awaits responses from other states in Europe. Russian presidential advisor Sergei Prihodko has stated that Moscow seeks to absorb the opinions of colleagues, then sit down at the negotiating table to avoid the appearance of unilateral Russian proposals. That way, he argued, the debate would not simply boil down to criticism of Russian proposals.⁴

Moreover, while on one hand the proposals may lack substance, on the other Moscow appears to be attempting to establish Russia as a central player in European, and indeed, global affairs. This active role includes renewed attempts to resolve (peacefully) the ongoing conflicts in Moldova/Transnistria and between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, Moscow has sought to be active in anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden, and attempted to play an active role in addressing the global financial crisis in the G-8/G-20 and APEC for a; indeed, the security element of Russia’s idea is just one part of a much broader agenda which includes economics and energy. Russia is attempting to oblige partners to come to Moscow with their proposals in the assumption that Moscow is an indispensable partner. Moscow therefore seeks to make itself the hub, of this debate, able to view (and cherry-pick) from the range of suitable options.

Clearly, Russia seeks to embed itself at the centre of decision-making processes in European political and security affairs, particularly regarding “hard” or military

³ Italy and France have both significantly developed their bilateral relationships with Russia over the last few months. Alongside significant trade and economic agreements, Italy has extended considerable political support to Russia for its actions during the conflict in the South Caucasus and announced support for Moscow’s ideas about the European architecture. France has enhanced its trade and economic relationship with Russia, and there are signs of cooperation between French military industrialists and the Russian Ministry of Defence regarding technical cooperation and the exchange of expertise.

⁴ Moscow has considered that some of its initiatives, such as the Kozak Memorandum for the resolution of the Moldova/Transnistria conflict, have been rejected not for “objective” reasons, but because they are Russian.

security matters. Ever louder statements emerge from Moscow that the West did not engage or welcome Russia during the 1990s and that Moscow is, as a result, shut out of decision-making processes in the Euro-Atlantic area. The following points are more specific aims:

- Moscow continues to seek joint and equal involvement in the command structures of peacekeeping operations.
- Moscow seeks Western recognition of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) by bringing it in to the “big debate” more formally.
- Equally, the two key elements driving Medvedev’s ideas are Moscow’s opposition to the planned US missile defence system and NATO enlargement, both of which are seen as unilateral decisions, made without consultation. One aim, illustrated in the call for a halt to all unilateral processes at least while the debate about the new architecture is ongoing, is to stall developments seen as contradictory to Russian interests – which, simultaneously, could test the cohesion of the Western community.
- Indeed, opposition to NATO is a key element of Moscow’s proposals. Though senior Russian officials assert that the proposals are not to undermine the existing structures and architecture, and indeed stress that NATO is invited to participate in the big debate, they simultaneously voice their disapproval of NATO-centrism in Europe and the destabilising effect this has on the wider region. Moscow argues that the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) does not work on the principles laid down at its establishment and that it is now effectively “26 + 1”. Even without the current crisis, Lavrov has argued, “a stock taking of principles needs to be carried out”. The OSCE is also subject to significant criticism by Moscow: senior Russian figures note that it does not have a binding legal basis and needs major reform.
- Similarly, the call for a legally binding, formalised Treaty is doubtless both in part an attempt to enshrine on paper a promise from NATO to not enlarge further (a promise which Moscow feels was made verbally at the time of the collapse of the USSR and subsequently disregarded by the alliance) and in part an attempt to alter or sidestep the OSCE.
- Moscow also seeks a reconsideration of arms control agreement – a reconsideration of the CFE is an important aim, alongside efforts to renegotiate strategic missile agreements with the USA.

Aside from the limited detail available, there appear to be a number of problems and inconsistencies in Russia’s big idea. First, Moscow has a range of domestic problems with which to deal, which both complicates its political agenda and reduces the resources available to pursue the agenda – the financial crisis is just one illustration.

Second, Moscow maintains that it is initiating an active agenda: as noted above, Moscow is making a variety of proposals for action. Yet while packaged as positive initiatives, most of Moscow’s agenda is negative: what it does not want to happen, rather than what it wants to happen, as illustrated by the “3 Nos”. Furthermore, it also seeks to discuss only part of the Helsinki agenda: the military security basket. While it seeks to reaffirm the Helsinki agenda, Moscow has sought to avoid focus on the human dimension and values. In this respect, then, Moscow’s initiatives are not so much “Helsinki 2” as “Helsinki 0.5”. Finally, there are many in the Euro-Atlantic community who note that while apparently proposing an active agenda, it is Moscow

that is the main obstacle to the effective development of the current architecture, blocking developments in the Council of Europe and OSCE, for instance.

Third, while NATO – and, to a certain extent, the OSCE – appear to be objects of disapprobation for Moscow, where the EU fits in to Moscow’s big idea is much less clear. Senior Russian figures have made positive announcements about the role of the EU as an important partner. Yet as an organisation, the EU is just as exclusive as NATO, if not more so given the nature of its economic activities; and the EU is increasingly active in developing its Eastern Partnerships.⁵ Indeed, this is a particular focus for the EU in 2009 – an Eastern Partnership summit is scheduled for March. Furthermore, there appears to be a direct tension emerging in EU-Russia relations as the Czech Republic takes over the Presidency of the European Council for the first half of 2009. Although relations have been resumed, Russia has not yet confirmed upcoming Permanent Partnership Council meetings, and there are already some doubts about whether the regular EU-Russia summit will take place.

Nevertheless, the meeting in Helsinki creates an opportunity, with a number of important vested interests at play. Russia, evidently, will seek results in the shape of a commitment to its agenda, even if this is scheduled for 2010 (i.e. during Kazakhstan’s Chairmanship of the OSCE).⁶ France will also be active in seeking a concrete conclusion to its European Council presidency. Equally, Finland, the current OSCE Chair in Office, which has pushed this issue into the spotlight at the Ministerial Council meeting, is also likely to push for a political declaration as the significant “deliverable” from its Chairmanship. The “informal” lunch is a chance to make something happen, to set an agenda and “work the details out later”.

In this light, the next few months present a complex strategic horizon. 2009 is a year of changing leaderships in the USA, the EU and NATO. It is also very symbolic – it sees the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the 10th anniversary of the Istanbul agreements. Against the background of the continuing global financial crisis, the significant potential for a resumption of hostilities in the South Caucasus (which would leave the EU in a precarious and somewhat exposed position, given the responsibilities it adopted as part of the ceasefire and implementation agreements of August and September) and a gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine (to which the EU continues to be highly sensitive) present real problems.

Such eventualities would only confirm Moscow’s belief that its proposals are a necessary step. However, both NATO and the EU have stipulated that while relations with Russia should continue, this does not represent “business as usual”, and increased tensions may push them to the opposite conclusion. There is an important trend emerging in which the Western community and Russia see the same evidence but come to very different conclusions. While it is true that there is no significant ideological division between the West and Russia leading to a new “Cold War”, it is increasingly the case that the world is seen in very different ways by both communities and the possibility of a significant split is real. A perception in Moscow of continued rejection of any and all of its initiatives will only contribute to this growing divergence over time and exacerbate feelings of isolation.

⁵ This includes Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Belarus.

⁶ While agreeing in principle to a summit in 2009, Moscow has also noted that this would be too early. The USA also seems unlikely to want to commit the new Administration to a summit in 2009.

In this context, there is also an opportunity for NATO to contribute a positive agenda: the ball is in the West's court. The NRC remains the most comprehensive mechanism for engaging Russia with the Transatlantic community – particularly given that Moscow's concerns are focused on hard security, and that many of the points of contention are ones in which NATO has a direct role; Russian interlocutors also hint that if Russia was a member of NATO, there would be no problem.

How the alliance chooses use this mechanism to develop an initiative to draw Russia into agreement on certain issues will provide an important prism for wider West-Russia relations. Can NATO's wider interests be met by engagement in Moscow's initiative, for instance regarding relationships with Central Asian states? One of the arguments posited by members of the Euro-Atlantic community is that the existing architecture does not need replacing, it simply needs to be made more efficient. If so, how can this be reconciled with the arguments of some in the same community that the NRC is dead? How can the NRC be reformed to stimulate real engagement? What if Moscow proposes Russian membership of NATO?

Annex I: The Five Principles and “3 nos”⁷

- Clear confirmation of the basic principles of security and international relations: international commitments are to be honoured, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence to be respected
- Confirm the non-use of strength or threats of strength in international relations. The document should guarantee commonality of interpretation of these principles. It may even outline approaches to prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts acceptable for all signatories.
- Guarantees of symmetrical security. The “3 Nos”:
 - No promotion of one's own security at the expense of others
 - No actions within the frameworks of alliances or coalitions within the common security zone
 - No development of military alliances at the cost of the security of other signatories
- No individual state or international organisation is to wield the exclusive right to maintain peace and security in Europe
- Signatories may find it expedient to set basic parameters of arms control and reasonable sufficiency of military development, as well as parameters of a new quality of interaction against drug trafficking, the proliferation of WMD and terrorism (and piracy)

⁷ These are drawn from President Medvedev's speech at Evian on 8 October 2008.