

The Russian proposal for a new European security system

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Since June 2008, when Russian president Dmitry Medvedev first proposed the adoption of a European security treaty, Russia has been intensively lobbying in favour of this initiative. During World Policy Conference in Evian, France on 8 October, the Russian president explained the original idea more precisely by presenting the five principles on which the new system should be based. The key element of Medvedev's plan remains the postulate of equal security for all, which, if implemented, would mean that no actions that might be perceived as threatening the security of others would be allowed. With such a subjective criterion in place, decisions such as the deployment of a missile shield or the enlargement of NATO would have to be negotiated by the European states with Russia.

The actual short-term objectives behind Russia's proposal are to stop NATO enlargement, and to open a debate on European security. The long-term objectives are to loosen trans-Atlantic ties, incapacitate NATO and grant Moscow a de facto right to veto decisions concerning European security.

Initial reactions from the European states show that Russia may succeed in achieving these short-term objectives. While a complete revision of the existing European security system is unlikely to happen, Moscow may also succeed in undermining the USA's influence in Europe and deepen the existing divisions among the European states in the domain of security (in other words, the divisions between those countries which co-operate more closely with the USA and those which have been seeking agreement with Russia).

The Russian proposal

President Dmitry Medvedev presented the initial proposal for a revision of the European security system during his visit to Berlin in June 2008. The proposal included the signature of a legally binding treaty (involving all states and organisations active in Europe). The Russian proposal has been subsequently repeated on many occasions, including by the Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov in his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2008.

The first step towards its implementation would consist in convening an all-European conference on security, also involving the United States and Canada (in a manner reminiscent of the 1975 Helsinki conference). The Russian proposal largely repeats Moscow's ideas of the 1990s (see the Appendix for more information), albeit reformulated in new circumstances. During the conference in Evian, President Medvedev elaborated on the original proposal. Medvedev presented the five principles on which the new architecture of European security should be based. The first two points are uncontroversial: they reassert the fundamental principles of security and inter-state relations (respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence) and the inadmissibility of the use of force or the threat to use force. The kernel of the Russian proposal is in point 3, which envisages the principle of equal security. As Medvedev has explained, it would be based on three 'no's': no ensuring of one's own security at the expense of others; no actions by military alliances or coalitions that undermine the unity of the common security space; and no development of military alliances that would threaten the security of other parties to the Treaty. Point 4 of the proposal reasserts that no state or international organisation should have exclusive rights on the provision of peace and stability in Europe. Finally, point 5 concerns arms control, although Medvedev only mentioned those agreements in this field which do not concern European states directly, but refer to Russian-US relations (such as the treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT) or the START I treaty, which expires in December 2009). The proposal does not mention the adoption of a new treaty on conventional arms control in Europe.

The context in which the Russian proposal has been presented is notable. President Medvedev has repeatedly opposed Europe (presented as Russia's pragmatic partner) to the USA (which has been portrayed as an irresponsible power threatening to harm international security), with the intention of creating the impression that Washington's actions are mainly prejudicial to the European states. At the same time Medvedev has used the conflict in Georgia, which, in his opinion, the existing structures have failed to prevent, as one of the main arguments demonstrating the necessity of building a new security system for Europe.

Reactions from the other players

So far, the reactions to Russia's proposal in the European states have been muted, at least at the official level. However, a division can already be observed between those states which are willing to open dialogue with Moscow (without prejudging the final outcome) and those that have closer relations with the USA or NATO and are in fact against it, for which reason they have not taken any position on the Russian proposal. Spain and France have taken the most unequivocal stance (and had already done so after the Georgian conflict). The Spanish prime minister Jose Zapatero spoke positively about the Russian proposal during his visit to Moscow on 1 October, and on the occasion of the Evian conference the French president Nicolas Sarkozy called for an OSCE summit to be convened in 2009 to open a debate on European security. Among Russia's key partners in Europe, Germany has not expressed any position on the question of a new accord on European security.

APPENDIX

Russian proposals concerning European security architecture in the 1990s

The main idea, which Russia has been trying to force through since the early 1990s, is to award a leading role in European security to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), to which the remaining institutions operating in this sphere (such as NATO, the WEU or the UE) would be subordinated to a greater or lesser extent.

In 1994, Russia presented the 'all-European partnership concept', which at that time was intended as a response to the possibility of NATO enlargement. It envisaged the creation of an OSCE Executive Committee and a strengthening of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC). The objective of the initiative was to establish a regional body (modelled on the UN Security Council) that would take the decisions concerning security in Europe and co-ordinate the functioning of the European security structures (including NATO, the UE and the CIS). In addition, the initiative envisaged that the CIS would be recognised as equal to NATO and the WEU, and that the particular organisations would retain their original areas of responsibility (with the CSCE, in charge of the Central European states, not belonging to any blocs).

Russia is also advocating the signature of a legally binding document concerning the principles of a new model of European security. The drafting of such a document started within the OSCE in 1996, ultimately producing a non-binding political document without security clauses, the Charter for European Security which was adopted in 1999 at the OSCE summit in Istanbul.

This is probably because the CDU/CSU and the SPD disagree on whether Germany should support the Russian proposal, and if so to what extent.

The United States has been sceptical about the Russian proposal, and a large number of European states have refrained from taking any positions.

Russia's objectives

The proposal presented by President Medvedev is part of Russia's wider policy, aimed at a revision of the European security architecture, which the Kremlin perceives as having been imposed by the West during the period of Russia's weakness following the breakup of the USSR.

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The short-term objectives behind Russia's proposal to conclude a new treaty on security in Europe are in fact to permanently stop NATO's enlargement in the CIS area (as a indirect consequence of which the West would implicitly admit that

Russia has special interests in that area) and to launch a political dialogue on a revision of the European security system.

The long-term objectives of Medvedev's proposal include loosening trans-Atlantic ties and undermining the USA's political influence in Europe (or at least limiting the US military presence); depriving NATO of its role as the key security organisation in Europe; and creating a new, all-European forum in which any decisions taken would have to be approved by all the parties concerned, including Russia, and to which the remaining security organisations active in the trans-Atlantic area would be subordinated. Should Russia's proposal be fully implemented, decisions such as the deployment of international peacekeeping forces,

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It is impossible to state clearly to what extent the Russian leaders assume that their proposal to revise the European security system could be fully implemented, and to what extent they are treating the proposal as merely a convenient way to deepen the divisions between the European states and the USA. The fact that the Russian

proposal does not include any solutions concerning conventional arms, demonstrations of military power or intensified modernisation of armed forces indicates that the latter may be indeed the proposal's ultimate intention.

Prospects for implementation

While a full revision of the European security architecture along the lines of the Russian proposal appears unlikely at this stage, it is probable that Moscow may achieve its short-term objectives as stated above.

The prospect of a halt to NATO's eastward enlargement is becoming increasingly realistic (Moscow's objections being one of the reasons for this). The calling of an all-European conference

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would also be a tactical success for Russia, since opening up a debate on security would imply a partial acknowledgement of the validity of Russia's points. The goal of permanently weakening of US influence in Europe, or at least deepening the divisions among European countries on the basis of their different attitudes towards Russia, also appears to be within Russia's reach.

In this context, it is also possible that if Western states decide not to enlarge NATO any further, this will imply a de facto acceptance of a division into zones of influence, as a consequence of which the status quo in the CIS area – that is, a situation in which Russian influence is predominant and the West is absent in the security sphere – would continue.

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