



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

When the XXII Olympic Winter Games open in Sochi on 8 February, vast numbers of people around the world will turn their eyes to this city on the Black Sea. One can assume Russian President Vladimir Putin will savour the attention. The Olympics in Sochi – a city with a subtropical climate located at the same latitude as Nice – was his dream and his fervent ambition. Six years of planning, demolition and reconstruction, and a seaside resort was transformed into a winter sports resort. This will have cost the Russian state an estimated 50 billion dollars.

The Olympics in Sochi is far more than a sports competition. In the eyes of the Russian leadership, as well as in the eyes of many Russian citizens, it is a prominent symbol of Russia's return to the world stage, a symbol of the political revitalisation of the geographically largest country of the world. This is the event Moscow has been waiting for ever since the fall of the Iron Curtain and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Empire – historic developments Vladimir Putin has called "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century".

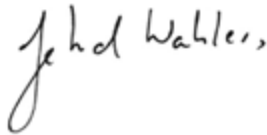
Since that time, the Kremlin has made repeated efforts to consolidate, or possibly even expand, Russia's influence in the post-Soviet sphere through regional cooperation endeavours. Speaking of political achievements in this context would represent a misjudgement. That said, it is worth taking a look at the latest efforts made by the Russian political leadership aimed at moving towards the Eurasian Economic Union. Our authors describe this integration project as follows: "This new project goes much further than its predecessors, at least in terms of the depth of the proposed integration." And they continue: "And above all, the real novelty is the fact that Russia has agreed to limit its own powers. The guiding light of this project has agreed that all member states should have equal voting rights, making

Russia at best *primus inter pares*." They believe the disparity in size and Russia's economic power will ensure "that Russia will still de facto assume the role of leader".

There is no doubt that Russia has the intention of playing out its dominant role to the limit. Canan Atilgan provides an impressive description of Armenia's dependence on Moscow particularly in matters of security policy, which ultimately led to the signing of the agreement to join the Customs Union. Lengthy negotiations with Brussels on an Association and Free Trade Agreement were suddenly consigned to the wastepaper basket. At the EU summit on the Eastern Partnership, Armenia was relegated to looking on from the sidelines. Alexander Brakel describes Belarus as a basically failed state, which is not viable without closer links to Russia. As Amos Helms explains, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev claims the vision of a Eurasian Union as his own, but has to acknowledge that his Russian counterpart has not only assumed the copyright to this idea, but also fleshed it out in terms of political content.

In the Ukraine, years of tough negotiations on an Association and Free Trade Agreement with the European Union ultimately led to a reorientation towards Russia after all, to the surprise of many – but not all. The consequences of this decision by the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich have produced ever more dramatic pictures over the last few weeks. The events taking place on Independence Square in Kiev and in large parts of the country illustrate that the reorientation of the country towards the east, which has now become more likely, very importantly also entails a different political culture and social order for the protestors, which they reject. They have realised that the Eurasian integration project is not aligned with liberal democratic values, but first and foremost represents a marriage of convenience involving the economy and power and, unlike the European integration project, is not based on a joint concept of the future of the involved states, but can be attributed to Russia's aspiration to secure and expand its own relevance on the global political stage as a regional power.

The European integration project has proved that regional integration, seen as cooperation between democratic actors to solve common challenges, can increase prosperity and secure peace. Regional integration, however, is only to be welcomed if it takes place on a voluntary basis. Where the Eurasian Union is concerned, this is not the case for all the states involved.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'G'.

Dr. Gerhard Wahlers
Deputy Secretary General

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