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The EU, NATO and the eastern Partnership: the unresolvable security dilemma

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“Without enlargement, Western Europe will always be faced with the threat of instability, conflict and mass migration on its borders.” – Tony Blair, Speech to the Polish Stock Exchange, Warsaw, 6 October 2000

The problem with Blair’s approach, of course, has been that each enlargement has led to even greater instability on the borders. Blair was making the case for enlargement to Poland, in order to avoid instability on the German-Polish border. The result was that the EU’s border became Belarus and Ukraine. The logic of Blair’s speech is that those two countries should therefore be admitted to the EU in order to avoid instability on those borders. The border would then become Russia. Enlargement to Turkey would give the EU a border with Syria, Iraq and Iran. Blair’s “logic” is fatally flawed. The fundamental security dilemma posed by EU and NATO “enlargement” has been that, as these two entities have moved ever closer to Russia proper, the blowback from Moscow has become ever more serious. With the events in Ukraine in the spring and summer of 2014, the dilemma became acute.

The post-1989 Enlargement Options: EU and NATO

From the moment the Berlin Wall fell, the issue of enlargement forced itself urgently onto the EU’s agenda. Initially, European political leaders were cautious or even negative. Margaret Thatcher tried hard to avoid even German reunification (the first such enlargement)¹. Former French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing went so far as to state that he would not wish to belong to a Europe that contained Poland². A lively controversy surrounds the alleged efforts of François Mitterrand to team up with Mikhail Gorbachev to

¹ Margaret Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, New York, Harper Collins, 1993, pp.796-98

² Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, “Notre Europe Telle Que Je La Vois”, *Paris Match* 19 July 1990



slow down the pace of change in Europe³. Mitterrand's proposal, on 1 January 1990, to create a European "Confederation" including all the countries of continental Europe, including Russia, was a thinly disguised attempt to offer the Central and Eastern Europeans an *alternative* to EU membership⁴. The debate at the time pitted those who felt that *deepening* the existing institutions and procedures of the EU should take precedence over *widening*. In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, most West European statesmen concentrated on the former, while the new leaders of Central and Eastern Europe hankered for the latter⁵. It rapidly became clear to everybody that EU enlargement was going to be a lengthy and complicated process. In June 1993, the "Copenhagen Criteria" were elaborated by the European Council as the targets which any aspiring EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe had to meet in order to qualify for accession: "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union".⁶ At the same time, there were widespread fears that unresolved security problems left over from the 1919 Versailles settlement – borders and minorities across much of Central Europe – would generate conflicts similar to that which erupted in Yugoslavia⁷. The "Balladur Plan" in 1994-1995, named for the French prime minister, was a complex diplomatic process whereby all Central and Eastern European countries were obliged to sign treaties with all their neighbours testifying to the resolution of all outstanding security issues between them. This too was a condition of accession to the EU. These treaties are collectively lodged with the OSCE⁸. EU enlargement became a major obstacle course and it was not until fifteen

³ Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War and German Unification*, Oxford Berghahn, 2009; Tilo Schabert, *How World Politics is Made: France and the Reunification of Germany*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2009; Jolyon Howorth, "France and the Unification of Germany: Clio's Verdict", *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 29/1, Spring 2011

⁴ Frédéric Bozo, "The Failure of a Grand Design: Mitterrand's European Confederation 1989-1991", *Contemporary European History*, 17/3, August 2008; Roland Dumas, "Un Projet mort-né: la Confédération européenne", *Politique Etrangère*, 66/3, 2001

⁵ See the debates that took place at the 9th Festival International de Géographie, Saint Dié des Vosges, 1-4 October 1998. The Conference was devoted to the theme of "L'Europe: Un Continent à Géographie Variable".

⁶ Frank Schimmelfennig, "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union", *International Organization*, 55/1, 2001; Christophe Hillion, "The Copenhagen Criteria and their Progeny", *Leiden University Papers*, March 6, 2014; Tim Haughton, "When does the EU make a difference? Conditionality and the Accession Process in Central and Eastern Europe", *Political Studies Review*, 5/7, 2007

⁷ Michel Foucher, *Fronts et Frontières, un tour du monde géopolitique*, Paris, Fayard, 1991

⁸ Lykke Friis & Anna Murphy, "Turbo-Charged Negotiations': The EU and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 7/5, 2000; Fraser Cameron and



years after the end of the Cold War, in 2004, that the Central and Eastern European countries, along with Cyprus and Malta and the Baltic states were finally admitted.

Given the sheer complexity of acceding to the EU, it is hardly surprising that the Central and Eastern European states prioritized NATO membership. At a meeting to inaugurate the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC in April 1993, President Clinton briefly received the leaders of Central and Eastern Europe one at a time. They all made the same request: NATO membership⁹. Clinton agreed and six months later launched the *Partnership for Peace* initiative at a meeting of NATO defence ministers in Travemünde. Within four years, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were invited to join and became full members in 1999¹⁰. But NATO enlargement, unlike the widening of the EU, was immediately perceived by Russia as a major security problem. Although the invitation to the three Central European countries was accompanied by a parallel overture to Moscow, offering dialogue and cooperation via a "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security", the Russian security community was by no means mollified. The enlargement of NATO was portrayed by its advocates as a benign project for the stabilization of Central Europe with no hostile implications for Russia. Indeed, it was asserted that, by bringing stability to Russia's hinterland, this would be directly in Russia's own interests¹¹. Its many opponents in the US saw it, on the contrary, in the words of perhaps its harshest critic – the father of "containment", George Kennan – as "the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold war era."¹² In a 1998 interview with the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, Kennan argued that "NATO expansion set up a situation in which NATO now has to either expand all the way to Russia's border, triggering a new cold war, or stop expanding after these three new countries and create a new dividing line through Europe"¹³. The events in Ukraine in 2014 constitute an eerie echo of that assertion. Russian leaders from Gorbachev to Putin have insisted that, during the discussions on German unification, Moscow was given informal "guarantees" by Western officials who pledged that NATO expansion would

Rosa Balfour, "The European Neighbourhood Policy as a Conflict-Prevention Tool", *European Policy Centre Issue Paper No.47*, June 2006

⁹ Catherine Kelleher, *The Future of European Security*, Washington DC, Brookings, 1995

¹⁰ Wade Jacoby, *The Enlargement of the European Union and NATO. Ordering from the Menu in Central Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2006

¹¹ James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The US Decision to Enlarge NATO*, Washington DC, Brookings, 1999; Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How The Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004; Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate 1990-1997: The Blessings of Liberty*, New York, Praeger, 1998

¹² George Kennan, "A Fateful Error", *New York Times*, 5 February 1997

¹³ Thomas Friedman, "Foreign Affairs: Now a Word from 'X'", *New York Times*, 2 May 1998



not extend beyond the territory of former East Germany¹⁴. This was repeated in Putin's speech in the Kremlin on 18 March 2014 after the annexation of Crimea¹⁵. Western officials have always denied that any such guarantees were given¹⁶, but it seems clear that there was, at the very least, a tacit understanding that NATO would not advance far into Eastern Europe. The Kosovo crisis merely exacerbated the situation, at the very moment when the three first new members were finally admitted to the Alliance. It precipitated "the most dangerous turn in Russia-Western relations since the early 1980s"¹⁷. This is not the place to elaborate in detail the protracted and increasingly bitter disputes between Western and Russian officials (and indeed *within* the Western policy-making elites) over NATO enlargement. Suffice it to note that opponents have been far more accurate than advocates in their assessment of the likely effect on Russia of the enlargement process. Harvard scholar Michael Brown predicted in 1995 that:

Russian aggression in Eastern Europe will be encouraged, not discouraged, by NATO expansion. The threat that NATO deployments were meant to address could be triggered by NATO actions, once again dividing Europe into two blocs. European security as a whole – Central and Eastern European security in particular – would be diminished, not enhanced.¹⁸

The Georgian crisis of 2008 and the Ukraine/Crimea crises of 2014 bear witness to the prescience of that observation.

The European Neighbourhood Policy

The prospect of enlargement to ten new member states in the East and the South raised in more concrete form the question Tony Blair had alluded to in his Warsaw speech: what happens next? It is one thing to welcome into the community of EU member states a number of former members of the Soviet Union and/or the Warsaw Pact¹⁹. It is quite another to decide what sort of relationship might be entertained with their authoritarian neighbours who

¹⁴ J.L.Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts or Bearing Arms?*, Lanham, Rowman & Little field, 1999, pp.7-22. Alexander A. Sergounin, "Russian Domestic Debate on NATO Enlargement: From Phobia to Damage Limitation", *European Security*, 6/4, 1997: See also Sean Kay, *NATO and the Future of European Security*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 1998

¹⁵ Address by President of the Russian Federation, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/6889>

¹⁶ Asmus, *op.cit* & Goldgeier, *op.cit*.

¹⁷ Oksana Antonenko, "Russia, NATO and European Security after Kosovo", *Survival*, 41/4, 1999-2000

¹⁸ Michael E. Brown, "The Flawed Logic of NATO Expansion", *Survival*, 37/1, 1995. On 26 June 1997, a group of 50 highly prominent foreign policy experts sent an open letter to President Clinton expressing their strong opposition to NATO expansion. See: <http://www.armscontrol.org/print/221>

¹⁹ Milada Vachudova, *Europe (Un)Divided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration after Communism*, Oxford University Press, 2005



remained outside the charmed circle of liberal market democracies²⁰. There is no obvious cut-off point for enlargement²¹. The philosophy underlying it suggests that the EU might almost indefinitely continue to export its liberal values to all who might wish to join. There is an implicit quasi-Kantian universalism to the process that does not admit of *finalité*. On the other hand, from a purely pragmatic perspective, many would recognise that the EU has to stop somewhere. The EU first began to think about this problem under pressure from the countries south of the Mediterranean who felt they had missed out on the promise of enlargement. In 1995, the Union created the *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* otherwise known as the "Barcelona Process"²² in an attempt to inject a measure of stabilisation into the Southern neighbourhood. But Barcelona proved to be a dead-end long before the collapse of the Middle East peace process and the Arab Spring confined it to the rubbish heap of history²³. In late 2002, European Commission President Romano Prodi initiated a new policy direction that was to lead, in 2004, to the ENP. The underlying thinking was to avoid the creation of new divisions in Europe by creating a "ring of friends" around the entire periphery²⁴. Seldom in the history of international relations has there been such a gulf between the intentions and the outcome.

There have been two fundamental flaws in the implementation of the ENP. The first has been the attempt to devise a "single" policy for a neighbourhood that, by any measure, contains a host of widely differing neighbours. The "one size fits all" approach was of course characterised by an assumption in Brussels that the disbursement of large sums of aid (conditional, of course, on movement towards European democratic norms) would transform the neighbours into clients prepared to do the EU's bidding. The second fatal flaw (repeating the mistakes of Mitterrand's failed *Confédération* of 1991) was to offer a policy that held out all sorts of prospects *other than accession*. For states that were keen to accede, this

²⁰ Daniela Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct*, Oxford University Press, 2013

²¹ *The Treaty of Rome offers expansion to "European countries", which, by any strict definition, would exclude Turkey. Yet Turkey has been in negotiations for accession for decades. There has occasionally been discussion of admitting Russia as a member state. If that were to happen, the EU would have borders with China and Japan...*

²² Richard Gillespie, *The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: Political and Economic Perspectives*, London, Frank Cass, 1997; Richard Gillespie & Richard Youngs (eds.), *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: the Case of North Africa*, London, Frank Cass, 2002

²³ Fulvio Attina, "The Barcelona Process, The Role of the European Union and the Lesson of the Western Mediterranean", *The Journal of North African Studies*, 9/2, 2004

²⁴ Karen Smith, "The Outsiders: The European Neighbourhood Policy", *International Affairs*, 81/4 2005; Michele Cornelli, "The Challenges of the European Neighbourhood Policy", *The International Spectator*, 39/3, 2004



approach spelled endless frustrations. For states with no interest in accession, the EU's insistence on *conditionality* consigned the policy to virtual irrelevance. In any case, conditionality was applied extremely selectively, a country like Belarus, which had little to offer the EU, being severely sanctioned for its authoritarianism, while Azerbaijan, which is equally undemocratic but supplies the EU with energy resources, received virtually a free pass²⁵. In addition, since the "policy" was entirely stripped of any geo-political considerations and was conducted largely by the European Commission as a technocratic exercise in following pre-established rules and procedures, it fell terribly foul of the major geo-strategic player in the neighbourhood: Russia.

The EU's relationship with Russia is both complex and relatively simple. Russia has never really understood – and certainly never taken seriously – the European Union as a unitary actor. Indeed, seen from Moscow, it isn't one! EU member states continue to allow themselves to be sucked by Russia into multiple bilateralisms which are profoundly prejudicial to the development of a unified strategic approach to Moscow. Russia has what it considers to be a series of "special relationships" with several EU member states, especially Germany, but also France, Italy and, in a rather different way, Poland. Naturally, given its size and weight, and given its overwhelming preoccupation with national interests at the expense of morality or ethics, Russia will make every effort to divide and rule among European member states. During the period of high expectations around the Lisbon Treaty, there were signs that Moscow was beginning to pay attention to the EU's potential as an international actor, but that only lasted as long as the excitement about Lisbon *within Europe*. The Union's inability to capitalize on the potential of Lisbon has thrown relations with Russia back to the bilateral "norm"²⁶.

This has only been exacerbated by the re-election of Putin. There is a widespread belief in diplomatic circles on both sides of the Atlantic that this re-election killed off the "reset". That European leaders, as well as President Obama, made no secret of their preference to do business with Dmitri Medvedev, merely reveals the extent of wishful thinking that goes on in the West. Putin has made it clear that he thinks most Western leaders (including Obama) are weak and duplicitous. Did Putin ever want a reset? In some

²⁵ Stefan Lehne, "Time to Reset the European Neighbourhood Policy", Brussels, Carnegie Europe, February 2014 accessed at: <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/02/04/time-to-reset-european-neighbourhood-policy/h02/>

²⁶ Sabine Fischer, "A Changing Russia? Implications for EU-Russia Relations" in Sabine Fischer (ed.) *Russia: Insights from a Changing Country*, Paris, EU-ISS, February 2012, Report No. 11.



ways, the EU has been in the business of constantly reaching for the reset button ever since Putin was first elected in 1999. But, as Thomas Graham has wisely noted, "if you have to hit the reset button repeatedly, you probably need a new computer [and] if a relationship never moves beyond the reset phase, it is probably fundamentally flawed"²⁷. Why would a newly energized President who believes fundamentally in *Realpolitik* do the EU the favour of taking it seriously as an actor when it fails to take itself seriously?

The "EU-Russia relationship" cannot even really *exist* until the EU has figured out not only what it hopes to achieve (collectively) with Russia, but also how it is going to conceptualize and frame a strategic partnership which makes it clear to Moscow (which means Putin) that common interests and goals can be pursued together. At the geo-strategic level, the EU and Russia both know that geography has condemned them to work out some sort of a relationship that goes beyond zero-sum games. The "common space" which lies at the heart of that relationship is currently the object of a tug-of-war between the EU and Russia. Prior to the Georgian crisis of 2008, Moscow did not appear to be unduly alarmed at the prospect of EU enlargement. It was NATO enlargement that enraged the Russian policy elites – and at the same time gave them a strong commonality of purpose that might not otherwise have been present. When the ENP was announced in 2004, there was no perceptible reaction from Moscow. It was only when the idea of the *Eastern Partnership* began to emerge in the wake of the Georgian War in 2008 that Russia began to become alarmed. The scheme for an *Eastern Partnership* (EP) – positing a much closer relationship with all the countries geographically located between the EU and Russia proper – followed relatively logically from the launch, in 2007, of the *Union for the Mediterranean* (UfM), a French project to replace the moribund Barcelona process with a revamped initiative towards the Southern neighbourhood²⁸. What this involved, of course, was a "policy" negotiated with the encrusted dictators who ruled over most of North Africa. When the Arab Spring erupted in 2011, the UfM proved to be utterly irrelevant to the most important development in the EU's neighbourhood since the end of the Cold War²⁹. The same could not be said about the crisis that erupted in the Eastern neighbourhood in 2013-2014.

²⁷ Thomas Graham, "The Future of US-Russian Relations", *Keynote lecture*, Yale University, Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, 21 February 2012

²⁸ Richard Gillespie, "A 'Union for the Mediterranean' or for the EU?", *Mediterranean Politics*, 13/2, 2008

²⁹ Volker Perthes, "Europe and the Arab Spring", *Survival*, 53/6, 2011; Ana Echagüe et alii, "Europe & the Arab Uprisings: EU Vision versus Member State Action", *Mediterranean Politics*, 16/2, 2011;



Vladimir Putin's reaction to the launch of the *Eastern Partnership* was to launch, in 2011, his own project for a *Eurasian Customs Union* (ECU), which was presented as an alternative source of integration for most of those same countries. Indeed, Putin even proposed that former Russian "neighbours" such as Finland, Bulgaria and even the Czech Republic and Hungary could become members of the *Eurasian Union*³⁰. This was a direct challenge to the EU, since membership of the Russian customs union would prove incompatible with membership of the *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement* (DCFTA) the European Commission was pressing on the six countries involved in the EP: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Instead of avoiding getting into a beauty contest with the Kremlin over the rival attractions of these two options, the EU took the view that the partnership countries would simply have to choose. This is where another flaw in the ENP kicked in. The EU's approach to its neighbours revealed a deep Euro-centrism that never doubted which way the partners would turn, and that arrogantly dismissed Russia as an almost irrelevant factor in the contest. The rest of the story is well known. Putin applied maximum pressure to the six post-Soviet states, succeeded in persuading Armenia to opt for the ECU and bribing Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovich to renege on his commitment to join the DCFTA at a summit in Lithuania in November 2013. There followed the "EuroMaidan" protests in Kiev, followed by the intervention of three EU foreign ministers, the flight of President Yanukovich and the crisis of spring and summer 2014, leading to the annexation by Russia of the Crimean peninsula and an incipient civil-war in Ukraine³¹.

To what extent can the EU enlargement process in general and the EP in particular be held responsible for the state of affairs in Ukraine that persisted into the fall of 2014? For some analysts, the EU's blithe mishandling of the complex relationship with the Eastern partners and with Russia is a major contributory factor to the chaos of summer 2014. Two British professors of international relations, Neil MacFarlane and Anand Menon, assert that the EP "was a classic example of the EU's proclivity for responding to events by adding long-term and rhetorically impressive, but resource-poor bolt-ons to existing policy [...] the deal offered by the EU was woefully inadequate in terms of the short-term inducements on offer: signing the DCFTA promised immediate pain to Ukraine in return for longer-term economic growth"³². This criticism echoes much of the negative comment that animated the discussions

³⁰ Rilka Dragneva & Kataryna Wolczuk, *Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?* London, Chatham House Briefing Paper, August 2012

³¹ Lehne, *op.cit.* pp. 7-9

³² Neil MacFarlane and Anand Menon, "The EU & Ukraine", *Survival*, 56/3, June-July 2014



of? American international relations experts in spring 2014³³. For others, it was the lack of precise intentions vis-à-vis Ukraine on the part of the EU that produced such political and psychological confusion among the Ukrainian people. Alyona Getmanchuk, Director of the Institute of World Policy in Kiev, arguing that the EU underestimated the pro-EU sentiments of the Ukrainian people and underestimated Russia's capacity to thwart EU plans, concluded that: "it is now crucial that the EU should finally determine where it wants to see Ukraine in the long-term: within the European Union or outside it? One of the main problems contributing to this crisis is that Russia knows exactly what it wants from Ukraine, while Ukraine clearly knows what it wants from the EU; but the EU has no clear policy goal"³⁴. Before the eruption of the crisis, the Ukrainian people were almost exactly split 50/50 in their preference for the DCFTA and for the ECU. Since Russian annexation of Crimea, support for the latter has dropped to around 25%. But what pro-EU Ukrainians really want is not a free trade agreement. They want EU membership. That is probably the one thing that is likely to remain off the agenda. In other words, the EU has succeeded in massively stimulating aspirations that it is almost bound to frustrate. The EU seems likely to end up with neither enlargement nor stability on the borders. Undeterred, the EU went ahead in late June 2014 and finally signed Association Agreements – including a DCFTA – with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Russia's capacity to counter Moldova's move in the direction of the EU is considerable – indeed it could easily render Moldova dysfunctional should it decide to do so³⁵. The EU is therefore embarking on a course that calls dramatically into question the nature of its on-going relationship with Russia, which now lies at the very heart of its enlargement programme.

The defence and security arrangements for this same "common space" between the EU and Russia are also engaged in a similar tug-of-war. Dmitri Medvedev launched the Russian proposals for "new security architecture" in Europe in October 2008, involving some structure embracing the EU and much of the former USSR³⁶. The details became clearer in June 2009 when Foreign Minister Serguei Lavrov presented a draft to the OSCE Annual Conference in Vienna. The Russians have always insisted that their proposals are only the starting point of a necessary discussion about common interests,

³³ Private list-serve postings February and March 2014.

³⁴ Alyona Getmanchuk, "Tracing the Origins of the Ukraine Crisis: Should the EU Share the Blame?", *Europe's World*, 15 June 2014.

³⁵ Jos Boonstra, "Moldova Signs, Moscow Sighs ...for Now", Madrid *FRIDE Commentary* No.12, June 2014

³⁶ Bobo Lo, "Medvedev and the New European Security Architecture", London, Centre for European Reform *Policy Brief*, July 2009



but the key elements, as far as the West is concerned are proposals for an overarching new security arrangement; a legally binding treaty; the restriction of the discussions to issues of hard security; and veto power for any country which felt threatened by another's move. To date, only France and Germany have shown any real interest and it is not clear whether Putin will pursue the idea. Although in the wake of the Georgia War, the idea of offering NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine was discreetly shelved, it has never been buried, and formally, in the run-up to the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014, NATO still holds out that promise for when the time is ripe. However, the West knows full well that this is a major Russian red line³⁷ and the challenge for diplomacy should be to find a way of transcending this security architecture conundrum.

What might be the elements of a strategic partnership in which the EU can leverage its shared interests with Russia? For a start, the EU and Russia share a concern about the rise of China. In the emerging multi-polar world, they are both declining powers. They are not about to enter into bilateral negotiations with each other as to "what to do about" China's rise because they are both very concerned not to prejudice their own bilateral relations with Beijing. But they do share a common interest here. Counter-terrorism is another issue they have shared (with the US and indeed with China and India) – long before 9/11. They are both keen to find a solution to the Iranian standoff. Both countries are concerned to find a definitive solution to the Israel-Palestine problem and they probably share more interests on this issue than either does with the USA – despite the trans-Atlantic rhetoric. They have a shared interest in underpinning stability in the Caucasus/Black Sea area. They share concerns about nuclear proliferation. As long as the situation in Afghanistan remains volatile, Russia is deeply concerned not to have a precipitate Western withdrawal generate regional chaos – and even Putin has gone to the remarkable lengths recently of officialising the NATO transit hub in the central Russian city of Ulyanov³⁸. This at a time when the Russian president was accusing NATO of abusing Resolution 1973 in Libya and of fomenting dissent in Syria. Russia and the EU certainly share a vital interest in stabilizing the flow of gas and oil from East to West. Although Russia could theoretically switch to China as its primary customer, the pipelines all run in the other direction and the difficulty of constructing and securing appropriate channels across the vast swathes of Siberia are legion.

³⁷ Andrei Zagorsky argues that Moscow believes "Russia can only prevail in a globalized world if it succeeds in preventing further erosion of the 'post-Soviet space'" in Sabine Fischer, *op.cit.* p.55

³⁸ Heidi Reisinger, "A NATO transit hub in Ulyanovsk – what's behind the Russian debate?", NATO Defence College, Rome, Research Report April 2012



Furthermore, how can the two sides deal with deep-rooted differences: human rights, democracy, the rule of law, corruption and organized crime? The EU no doubt fears that none of this is going to get better under Putin II. But the promotion of Western “values” inside Russia is a double-edged sword. There is little doubt that Putin is more concerned about the spread of Western values inside Russia than he is about NATO. The more European politicians and the media express support for liberals and jailed activists such as Khodorkovsky, the more those individuals are considered suspect by large swathes of Russian public opinion³⁹. The key here is for the West to differentiate between different Russias, to recognise the existence of what the political geographer Natalia Zubarevich has called “Four Russias” and to concentrate their communication very subtly on “Russia No. 1: the land of post-industrial cities”, where Western values are increasingly taken seriously by a growing and active middle-class⁴⁰. The other three Russias will in any case pay no attention to Europe.

The stakes are very high. The relationship with Russia – its irrepressible and gigantic neighbour – is arguably the European Union’s most important. Without an EU strategic approach, the Russians will continue to run rings around the EU member states. And those states – however much each one of them may think they can gain strategic advantage over one another through bilateral deals with Moscow – will be the primary losers. The most urgent item on the EU enlargement agenda in summer 2014 is the forging of a true strategic partnership with Russia. Alas, the prospects for such a development seem further away than ever.

³⁹ See, on this, Konstantin von Eggert, “Russian Power, Russian Weakness”, *Policy Review*, No.172, March 30, 2010

⁴⁰ Natalia Zubarevich, “Four Russias: Re-thinking the post-Soviet Map”, *Open Democracy* 29 March 2012.