



## Re-setting US-EU-Russia Relations Moving beyond Rhetoric

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### Abstract

After a period of severe turbulences, the United States, Europe, and Russia seem willing to start out on a new course. While rightly rejecting the notion of spheres of influence as an outdated Cold War relic, the United States and its European allies need to recognize that a stable security order for Europe can hardly be achieved without involving Russia as one of its constitutive parts. Such a new system would probably increase Russia's cooperation on issues of vital interest for the United States and Europe, such as nuclear nonproliferation (e.g. Iran) and the fight against Al Qaeda (e.g. Afghanistan). Following a concise summary of US-European-Russian relations since the early 1990s, the argument is made that a 'strategy of engagement' aiming to create a single security space best serves Europe's long-term stability.

**Keywords:** *Transatlantic Relations / US Foreign Policy / Russia / European Union / Bilateral Relations / NATO / Arms Control / Energy Security*

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## Re-setting US-EU-Russia Relations. Moving beyond Rhetoric

by Riccardo Alcaro and Emiliano Alessandri\*

After a period of severe turbulences, the United States, Europe, and Russia seem willing to start out on a new course. 'Pushing the reset button', as suggested by US Vice President Joe Biden, is an alluring formula, but it is no guide for action. A new US and European arrangement with Russia is more likely to endure if all parties learn from the troubled experience of the last few years.

At the root of the disagreements and tensions of the past years is, in fact, the lack of a shared vision of Europe as a single security space. Russia is blatantly dissatisfied with the political and security outline of post-Cold War Europe. In particular, since Vladimir Putin's second term as president, Moscow has opposed a number of US-led initiatives ever more vehemently, and has presented the defense of an area of 'privileged interests', largely coinciding with the former Soviet space, as a legitimate claim.<sup>1</sup>

While rightly rejecting the notion of spheres of influence as an outdated Cold War relic, the United States and its European allies need to recognize that a stable security order for Europe can hardly be achieved without involving Russia as one of its constitutive parts. Such a new system would probably increase Russia's cooperation on issues of vital interest for the United States and Europe, such as nuclear non-proliferation (e.g. Iran) and the fight against Al Qaeda (e.g. Afghanistan).

Following a concise summary of US-European-Russian relations since the early 1990s, the argument is made that a 'strategy of engagement' aiming to create a single security space best serves Europe's long-term stability.

### From co-optation to confrontation

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, US and Western European leaders agreed that Russia should be integrated into the emerging post-bipolar order on the assumption that the costs of isolating it would be higher than those of co-opting it. Russia, for its part, saw engagement with the West as the only viable way to continue to play a significant role in the post-Cold War era.

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<sup>1</sup> Russia's President Dmitry Medvedv used the formula 'privileged interests' in a TV interview on Television Channels Channel One, Rossia, NTV, on 31 August 2008 (the full text of the interview is available at [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/31/1850\\_type82912type82916\\_206003.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82912type82916_206003.shtml)).

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From the mid 1990s to 2000, Russia's relations with the West became more complex and difficult. The Clinton administration decided to enlarge NATO to the East, a move which Russia saw as unnecessary if not offensive and, in any case, imposed without prior discussion. In 1999, NATO waged war against Yugoslavia over Kosovo, reinforcing Russia's concerns that its mission was not the stabilization of Europe, as Western leaders declared, but extension of the area of US/Western hegemony. Russia was also faced with the unpleasant reality of its growing economic weakness and internal decline. The financial crisis of 1998 aggravated an economic and social situation that was already gloomy.

After 9/11, Russia decided to side with America in the struggle against Al Qaeda. Moscow thought it could benefit, at different levels, from an alliance with the United States: it would acquire leverage and international prestige in what appeared to be the beginning of a new phase in American foreign policy and international relations; and it could use its contribution to the campaign against terrorism to demand less interference in its internal affairs, starting with human rights issues and the Chechnya question (the Kremlin quickly started to present the Chechen separatists as part of the broader menace emanating from Islamic terrorism). The US welcomed Russia's proposals for cooperation, convinced that Moscow was doomed to remain the junior partner in the relationship.

The period 2003 to 2008 saw a shift, if not a reversal, of some of the previous paradigms. Under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia regained economic power, mainly thanks to ever-increasing energy prices, and internal stability, albeit at the expense of reduced civil and political freedoms. A more confident Russia moved along an increasingly assertive, nationalistic line, looking back at its 'dependence on the West' in the 1990s as a stain on its history. America and Europe grew more skeptical about Russia being able to transform in the short to medium term – if ever – into a full-fledged democracy and were forced to reassess Moscow's role as one of Europe's great powers.

In 2003, Russia stood out as one of the leading opponents to the US-led invasion of Iraq. In the following years, Moscow protested that a number of US-led initiatives ranging from NATO's eastern enlargement, to the US plan to install elements of its missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland, and the recognition of Kosovo's independence, aimed at 'encircling' it. The colored revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) that brought pro-Western governments to power were, not surprisingly, presented by Moscow as responding to a US design – a perception reinforced by the Bush Administration's strong support for Ukraine and Georgia's NATO bids. A number of diplomatic and trade clashes with EU countries, most notably the United Kingdom and former Soviet satellites, only added to the tensions. On top of it all, the Kremlin tightened its grip on energy exports, apparently regarding them as a valuable foreign policy asset.

The Georgian war of August 2008 marked an all time low post-Cold War US-European-Russian relations, exposing the limits of the policy of cooptation pursued in the previous years and leading many to fear that a new era of confrontation was unavoidable. This, however, has not happened.

## Where to re-start

In spite of the awfully long list of issues on which the United States, European countries, and Russia have been at odds in the last few years, none of the three has seemed willing to raise the level of competition to the breaking point. Not even after the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war has the specter of a new Cold War materialized. On the contrary, the crisis in the Caucasus seems to have strengthened the orientation to prefer *détente* to confrontation. Nothing exemplifies this spirit better than Vice President Biden's remark about the need to "push the reset button", welcomed both in Europe and Russia.<sup>2</sup>

However difficult, the relationship between the United States, Europe and Russia, it is made up of not only competing but also overlapping interests, among which stand out issues of the utmost importance such as nuclear proliferation, arms control, counter-terrorism and other non-security matters like global financial stability, climate change, etc. In the area of competing interests, some of the thorniest issues that have plagued US-Europe-Russian relations in recent years have passed the acute phase: Kosovo has declared its independence, Georgia and Ukraine's prospects to join NATO have been moved further into the future, deployment of missile defense is not at the top of the Obama Administration's agenda.<sup>3</sup> Russia seems to have successfully resisted, at least for the moment, some of the US-led initiatives it was most opposed to, while regaining an apparent strategic advantage in the Caucasus, where its military presence and political influence have increased after the war with Georgia, and in Central Asia, where its efforts to drive the US out of the area seem to be working. Finally, the financial meltdown and economic crisis have drained important resources and could make self-restraint a more appealing option for all parties. This could be particularly true for Russia, which is heading towards a sharp contraction of its economy after years of sustained growth, mainly due to the fall in oil prices.<sup>4</sup>

A window of opportunity to re-start cooperation, therefore, might have opened up. But it is narrow and limited in time as none of the most contentious issues have been permanently settled and new ones could arise. Making progress in the areas of overlapping interest would highlight the benefits for all parties accruing from greater cooperation, while undoubtedly contributing to rebuilding a sense of mutual trust. But it would still not be enough. Neglecting or leaving aside the areas of competing interests for the sake of peace is short-sighted and self-delusory, since issues like Georgia and Ukraine's NATO bids cannot be kept off the agenda indefinitely. At the same time,

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<sup>2</sup> Vice President Biden used the expression 'time to press the reset button' in the Obama Administration's first major foreign policy address at the Munich Security Conference last February (Joseph R. Biden, *Speech at the 45th Munich Security Conference, 7 February 2009*, available at [http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu\\_2009=&sprache=en&id=238&](http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2009=&sprache=en&id=238&)). Later on, US State Secretary Hillary Clinton presented her Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov with a mock 'reset' button.

<sup>3</sup> The point is made by Andrew Kuchins, "Europe and Russia: Up from the Abyss?", in *Current History*, Vol. 108, No. 716, March 2009, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup> Russia's GDP is forecast to drop by 5% in 2009. Still in 2008 it had grown by 6% (Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Forecast - Russia*, 22 May 2009, extract available at <http://www.economist.com/Countries/Russia/profile.cfm?folder=Profile-Forecast>).

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while agreeing to disagree could buy some time, it cannot be regarded as a sustainable approach. Actions should be taken to create an environment in which the behavior of all parties is predictable and their interests presented and advanced constructively; the costs of confrontation are clearly higher than cooperation and the rule of law is the cornerstone of Europe's stability.

### **A strategy of engagement with Russia**

From the foregoing, it follows that a strategy of engaging Russia should be the first choice for both Europeans and Americans. Adopting a strategy of 'soft' containment, as was suggested in particular after Russia's intervention in Georgia, would amount to conceiving of the relationship with Russia as a zero-sum game.<sup>5</sup> More critically, the very idea of containment postulates that Russia's foreign policy is bent on expansionism, whereas in the Kremlin's view, Russia has been primarily reacting to US-championed expansionist policies, most notably NATO enlargement. Engagement, however, should not be confused with acquiescence. Some European countries, most notably Germany and Italy, have indeed already opted convincingly for engagement, in the hope that deeper economic integration and political dialogue will assure them greater influence over Russia than detachment or criticism. Actually, though, evidence points in the opposite direction. Even Germany, arguably Moscow's most important partner, has not been able to have any significant impact on Russia's international behavior, the Kremlin's agenda has been unaffected.<sup>6</sup> Especially in the last two and a half years, the engagement policy advocated by Germany and others seems to have turned into passivity. In the absence of concrete results, the approach has been kept up as if engagement were an end in itself instead of a means.

A strategy based on engagement should be proactive and able to adjust to changing circumstances. Russia should be called on constantly to respond to initiatives offering it opportunities but also implying responsibilities. It should be involved in the process of defining the outlines of Europe's security space including the 'land in-between'<sup>7</sup> (former Soviet republics in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus). And, more substantially, it should be consulted on issues of international concern where its role is needed or where it brings a clear added value. But Russia should be prevented from setting the agenda on its own terms and it should be made clear that it wields no veto power.

The effectiveness of an engagement strategy is strictly related to the degree of cohesion within the European Union and between the United States and Europe. Closer transatlantic coordination and greater unity at EU level would lend more

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<sup>5</sup> For a critical discussion of the 'soft' containment option, see Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, *A power audit of EU-Russia relations*, London, European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2007 (ECFR Policy Paper No. 2/2007), pp. 51-52, [http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/eu\\_russia\\_relations/](http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/eu_russia_relations/).

<sup>6</sup> On Germany's lack of influence on Russia, see Constanze Stelzenmüller, "Germany's Russia Question - A New Ostpolitik for Europe", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (March-April 2009), pp. 89-100; on the origin of Germany's approach to Russia, see Christopher S. Chivvis and Thomas Rid, "The Roots of Germany's Russia Policy", in *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April-May 2009), pp. 105-122.

<sup>7</sup> The expression is drawn from a presentation by Robert Levgold at Chatham House on the topic: "Can there be a US-European Partnership in Policy toward Russia?" on 17 April 2009, which one of the authors had the chance to attend.

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credibility and coherence to US and European proposals for cooperation, while making it more difficult for Russia to get around or ignore them. The difficulties that the US and the Europeans have often found in coalescing around common positions undoubtedly stem from a different order of priorities concerning Russia. There is some truth in the view that the US focuses almost entirely on geopolitics, while Europeans are unable to harmonize the much wider and more complex set of issues they are confronted with (mainly due to their geographic proximity to Russia and their strong reliance on its energy supplies).

However, particular interest configurations do not automatically dictate policy positions, as illustrated by the fact that the same US administration has sometimes held different attitudes towards Russia, and that EU member states with comparable interests sometimes have diverging approaches. For instance, a high level of energy dependence does not automatically translate into a more acquiescent stance towards Russia (Lithuania and Poland, for instance, in spite of their massive reliance on Russian gas deliveries, have in the past gone as far as vetoing the start of talks over the new EU-Russia 'strategic partnership' treaty). The same applies to countries with no significant energy links with Russia, some of which (e.g. Britain, Denmark, Sweden) have criticized Moscow more, whereas others (e.g. Spain) have supported a softer line. At the origin of the Russia policies of the United States and the various EU members lies a complex of not always interconnected elements, ranging from interest-based calculations (especially on energy), security perceptions, national identity, historical legacy, and more local issues (the presence of Russian minorities, sustained flows of Russian migrants, and others). Precisely because intra-EU as well as transatlantic divisions on Russia are the product of particularistic interest projections, reconstituting cohesion both within Europe and across the Atlantic is a matter of political choice.

### **Towards a new security compact**

Cohesion at the EU and transatlantic levels can only spring from well-balanced compromises. Differences within the European Union and NATO should not become stumbling blocks leading to inaction or ambiguities concealing rather than solving problems. Compromises that are sustainable and practical will never be the ideal solution for any single country, but they probably represent a better alternative. Nothing testifies to this fact more convincingly than the controversies surrounding NATO enlargement to Georgia and Ukraine. The inclusion of these items in the Alliance's agenda has exposed significant fissures among allies, has pushed Russia towards a more aggressive stance, and has ultimately produced a weak outcome. NATO's promise at the April 2008 Bucharest summit that Georgia and Ukraine will join NATO one day is as solemn as it is uncertain regarding its fulfillment – and the original divisions still persist among NATO allies about whether or not to take such a step. In hindsight, it seems safe to say that offering the prospect of NATO membership to countries that are politically unstable, can offer no solid guarantee of reliability, and have unsolved disputes with their neighbors, was a *faux pas*.

Allies, however, cannot realistically renege on their promise lest their credibility suffer a serious blow. In view of working out a strategy of engagement with Russia, the allies should aim for new and more advanced solutions, overcoming the membership/non

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membership dichotomy. They could envision a single European security space within which the legitimate security concerns of Georgia and Ukraine are adequately taken into account. Europeans and Americans may find it worth lending substance to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's call for a 'new Euro-Atlantic security architecture', recognizing that NATO cannot exhaust all Europe's security needs.<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, a European security space centered entirely on NATO would continue to meet Russia's opposition, would depend on a lasting US commitment, and would ignore the EU's efforts to contribute more directly to keeping Europe safe and stable.

The 'new security architecture' would provide a larger framework than NATO. The Alliance would be a constituent part of it, alongside a European Union able to act as a security provider, the United States, and Russia. A new European security treaty, as hinted at by Medvedev, seems beyond reach for the time being, but a political agreement could be feasible. Such an agreement would have to rest on some basic elements: NATO's role as the main defense provider of its members would not be reduced; the EU's security and defense profile would be raised to the point that the United States, still a vital contributor to European security, would no longer be asked to be its only guarantor; and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) would be revived, through the re-activation of key arms control treaties, starting with the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), to be complemented with a bilateral US-Russia agreement on nuclear forces reduction supported by both NATO and the European Union. The ultimate goal of the 'new architecture' would be to anchor Europe's stability not to an untenable balance between anachronistic 'spheres of influence', but to a single system guaranteeing the legitimate interests as well as the independence of all parties.

The CFE treaty, imposing limits on size and deployment of conventional forces, is one of the most eminent victims of the recent tensions with Russia. NATO countries refuse to ratify the updated version of the treaty until Moscow pulls its troops out of Georgia and Moldova, while Russia has suspended its implementation protesting that NATO has persistently ignored its security concerns. The war in Georgia has hardened the respective positions. However, NATO members might find it useful to consider ratification of the CFE treaty as the effects of the treaty's entry into force may pay off more than sticking to demands that have become unrealistic. This argument is based on the assumption that the Americans and Europeans lack the power, or at least the will, to reverse Russia's actions in the Caucasus.

Nonetheless, the transatlantic partners, and the United States in particular, are not entirely short of leverage to use on Russia. Progress on nuclear forces reduction and deferral of the deployment of the US missile shield in Eastern Europe are something the Kremlin may be willing to pay a price for. The former is by far the most promising area of overlapping interest, and talks over replacement of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) made progress after the preliminary agreement reached at the Obama-Medvedev summit last July. Potentially, the stakes for Russia are high. A deal would reduce the maintenance costs of its expensive nuclear arsenal and – perhaps more crucially – slow down development of the US' new nuclear-related military technologies, a race Russia can hardly compete in.

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<sup>8</sup> President Medvedev first floated the idea during his first address to Russia's ambassadors in July 2008.

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Missile defense is a more complex and sensitive issue. The US plan to extend its missile shield to Eastern Europe has been a major source of tension since 2007, as Russia sees it as potentially undermining its nuclear deterrence and altering the strategic balance in Europe. A US-Russia settlement on the issue is therefore a *sine qua non* if an engagement strategy with Russia is to bear significant fruits. Contrary to its predecessor, the Obama Administration does not seem to be unconditionally committed to the missile defense project. The new, more nuanced message from the White House is that the US has now established a stronger interrelation between the urgency of developing a missile defense capacity and the potential ballistic threat from an Iran gone nuclear. That shift seems to be consistent with a strategy of proactive engagement, as it attempts to turn a bitter dispute into an opportunity: it shows Russia respect while calling upon it to take responsibility for helping the US and Europe curb Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Like the United States and Europe, Russia is opposed to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, and has given its consent to successive rounds of UN-mandated sanctions against Tehran. However, Moscow does not believe the Iranian bomb is imminent, and has worked (along with China) toward watering down the measures initially put forward by the United States and the Europeans. In fact, the Kremlin might be convinced that it is actually profiting from the current state of play: its ambivalence allows it to maintain links with the government in Tehran, which provides it with an entryway to the Gulf region which is off limits for the United States and its allies. However, as has been rightly pointed out, Russia is benefiting from a situation that it is only partially able to influence, and which might produce an outcome that is undesirable for the Kremlin.<sup>9</sup> A nuclear Iran would undoubtedly deal a serious blow to the US' clout in the region, but a new nuclear power along its insecure southern borders would also harm Russia's security. If, on the contrary, the United States and Europe were eventually able to find an agreement with Iran and US-Iran rapprochement were to follow, Russia would be better off being part of the process leading to the peaceful settlement of the nuclear standoff. By linking the deployment of the missile shield to the actual materialization of the Iranian threat, Washington has given Russia an even more attractive reason to be receptive to American and European calls for incisive action on Iran.

Afghanistan is another area of both competing and compatible interests. While Russia is concerned about a spillover of instability from Afghanistan into the Central Asian republics, it also wants the United States out of Central Asia (and has acted accordingly). Given NATO's high stakes in Afghanistan, the United States and its European partners should give Russia assurances that they have no intention of establishing a permanent military presence in Central Asia; make clear that political and economic ties with regional countries are no threat to Russia's regional interests; find ways to cooperate on issues of mutual concern (such as drug trafficking); and work on widening the scope of NATO-Russia cooperation in containing the Taliban challenge in Afghanistan. In this respect, Russia's recent decision to allow for supplies of even lethal material for the NATO-led ISAF mission to be transported over its air space is a highly positive development. The fact that such a critical country as Pakistan

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<sup>9</sup> See Eugene Rumer and Angela Stent, "Russia and the West", in *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April-May 2009), pp. 91-104, [http://ceres.georgetown.edu/about/recentfacultypublications/51-2\\_09\\_Rumer.pdf](http://ceres.georgetown.edu/about/recentfacultypublications/51-2_09_Rumer.pdf).



has been destabilized by Islamic radicalism should serve as a reminder that the focus in the region should be on security and stability rather than competition for influence.

### De-securitizing energy

A critical topic which has climbed up the Russia agendas of the United States and European countries in the last few years is energy. After a series of disputes (mainly on prices) between Russia and transit countries Belarus and Ukraine resulted in disruptions in oil and gas supplies, energy has been increasingly dealt with under the heading of, or at least in relation to, security. However, the notion of 'energy security', when applied to the US and European relationships with Russia can mean different things and can, ultimately, be misleading rather than enlightening. The energy chapters of the US and European Russia agendas reveal dissimilar interests. Washington looks at the issue in geopolitical terms, as it is mainly worried about Russia taking control of energy resources in the former Soviet space and cynically using them as a foreign policy tool. EU members, on the other hand, have extensive energy relationships with Russia, which is the EU's largest gas supplier and one of the main sources of its oil imports.<sup>10</sup> Economic, industrial, and trade calculations matter far more than geopolitics in the EU members' reasoning about their energy relationship with Russia.

The reality of the EU-Russia relationship is more complex – and less troubling – than the vulgarised media version of a European Union in thrall of Russia's state-controlled supply companies. The Union is by far Russia's most lucrative customer: in 2006 it still absorbed 50% of its oil exports and around 70% of its gas exports.<sup>11</sup> Russia lacks the resources and time to re-direct its pipeline system – which runs west – to China and Asia, as some fear. In the mid-term, Moscow has no option other than to sell its energy to Europe, so it is as reliant on the EU's energy purchases as the European Union is on its supply.

Russia's energy leverage stems not from the EU's dependence, but from the deep asymmetry of the Russia-EU energy relationship. The level of imports from Russia varies significantly among EU members both in relative and absolute terms,<sup>12</sup> as does the kind of energy relationships with Moscow – ranging from a simple 'buyer-seller' relationship (e.g. with the Baltic states) to sophisticated forms of partnership between Russia's energy giants and European companies (e.g. the Russo-German and Italo-Russian ventures on Nord Stream and South Stream, the planned gas pipelines running under the Baltic and the Black Seas)<sup>13</sup>. This asymmetry has often been to

<sup>10</sup> Between 2000 and 2006 the EU oil imports from Russia rose from 19% to 32%, while gas imports decreased from 49% to 39%, even though they actually rose in absolute terms (see Giorgio V. Brandolini, "Il controllo del petrolio e del gas naturale nella Federazione Russa", in *Acque & Terre*, n. 1/2009, pp. 23-28).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2007 Estonia imported 100% of its gas from Russia's Gazprom, amounting however to just 1 bmc; Italy relied on Gazprom for 27,5% of its gas consumption, which amounts to 82,95 bmc (ENI, *World Oil & Gas Review 2008*, [http://www.eni.it/wogr\\_2008/gas-gas\\_in\\_the\\_world-0.htm](http://www.eni.it/wogr_2008/gas-gas_in_the_world-0.htm); Gazprom, *Annual Report 2008*, <http://www.gazprom.com/investors/reports/2008/>).

<sup>13</sup> North Stream is owned by North Stream AG, a consortium comprising Gazprom, Germany's Wintershall and E.ON, and the Netherlands' Gasunie. South Stream is a joint venture between Gazprom and Italy's ENI.

Moscow's advantage, as Russia has managed to clinch bilateral deals on favourable terms. Fragmentation in the EU energy relationship with Russia is also an important factor behind the Union's poor performance in protecting its members' energy needs when Russia's fierce disputes with Belarus and especially Ukraine led to cut-offs in oil and gas deliveries.

The EU's most urgent goals are to bring an end to supply disruptions and to the disputes between Russia and transit countries, so that predictability can become the norm in Europe's energy dimension. A more integrated EU energy market, with closer interconnections among its distribution networks, could ensure that temporary emergencies in single EU states are relieved by the other members.<sup>14</sup> The direct involvement of the European Union in addressing the technicalities – and reducing the opacities – of the Russia-Ukraine energy relationship would contribute to removing the causes of the harmful, recurring disputes between the two.<sup>15</sup> In its relations with Russia, it would probably be more advantageous for the European Union to reinforce its negotiating position vis-à-vis Russia than to concentrate on diversifying source countries, not least because the latter would hardly solve its 'dependence' problem. Much hope has been pinned on the 'Nabucco' pipeline, which should bring Caspian gas to Europe via Turkey but, even when fully operational, it would only cover a tiny fraction of the EU's energy demands.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the EU could aim at negotiating firmer guarantees of no supply disruptions in its new 'strategic partnership' agreement with Russia; insisting on reciprocity as the rule governing access of Russian companies to its energy market;<sup>17</sup> standardizing the procedures of EU members' deals with Russia (like Nord Stream and South Stream) so as to ensure that they do not put the needs of bypassed EU member states at risk.<sup>18</sup>

A fully stabilized energy relationship between the EU and Russia would rein in US concerns about Russia exploiting energy exports as a foreign policy tool, and incentivize a healthy de-securitization of energy. Talk about a Russia-run gas OPEC or a NATO including energy security among its tasks may be no more than talk, but it fuels mutual mistrust and reinforces the perception that energy is just a new front in the relationship between Russia and the West that cannot but be competitive (or worse).

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<sup>14</sup> See Roland Götz, "Pipeline-Popanz. Irrtümer der europäischen Energiedebatte", in *Osteuropa*, Vol. 59, Special issue: Energie-Dossier (January 2009), pp. 11-14.

<sup>15</sup> On the necessity of making the Russia-Ukraine energy relation a constitutive part of the EU energy policy, see James Sherr, "Europe, Russia, Ukraine and Energy: Final Warning", in *The World Today*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (February 2009), pp. 14-17; on the opacity of Ukraine's energy market, see Edward Chow and Jonathan Elkind, "Where East Meets West: European Gas and Ukrainian Reality", in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 77-92, [http://www.twq.com/09winter/docs/09jan\\_ChowElkind.pdf](http://www.twq.com/09winter/docs/09jan_ChowElkind.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> On Nabucco's many shortcomings, see, among others, Roland Götz, "Pipeline-Popanz", *cit.*, p. 15, and Jeronim Perović, "Farce ums Gas. Russland, die Ukraine und die EU-Energiepolitik", in *Osteuropa*, Vol. 59, Special issue: Energie-Dossier (January 2009), p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Several experts maintain that reciprocity is potentially the greater instrument at EU disposal to influence Russia. See, among others, James Sherr, "Europe, Russia, Ukraine and Energy: Final Warning", and Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, *A power audit of EU-Russia relations*, *cit.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 60-61.

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## Conclusion

When Russian troops were ordered into Georgia in August 2008, Western-Russian relations seemed headed towards a complete breakdown. The war was just the last chapter of a long story increasingly characterized by misunderstanding, mistrust, and confrontation. Less than a year later, the picture no longer looks hopeless. Leaders in America, Europe, and Russia have stepped back from the brink, showing a preference for *détente*. US Vice President Biden has gone so far as to declare that it is high time for the US, Europe and Russia to 'push the reset button' and reframe their relationship on a cooperative basis. Positive receptions both in Europe and Russia of Biden's emphatic remark induce us to believe that there is room for revamping cooperation.

A tendency to focus on the areas of overlapping interest, exemplified by the prompt resumption of US-Russian talks on nuclear forces reduction, has apparently emerged. Selective engagement on specific topics can certainly contribute to rebuilding mutual trust and a commitment to cooperate. However, it is hardly a recipe for shifting US-Europe-Russia relations from a competitive to a cooperative pattern. Some of the most contentious issues that have beset American and European relations with Russia in the last few years have passed the acute phase, but are far from being solved. The now frozen dispute over Georgia and Ukraine's NATO membership is just the tip of the iceberg of a larger problem: the failure to give birth after the Cold War to a new security architecture incorporating the vision of a Europe finally whole and free.

If cooperation, instead of selective engagement or competition, has to eventually become the keystone of the US-European-Russian security relationship, Europe should ultimately be seen as a single strategic system. In this respect, US and European leaders could find it useful to take Russian President Medvedev's call for a 'new security architecture' seriously (perhaps even more seriously than Medvedev himself), and present Moscow with bold proposals involving both opportunities and responsibilities. Unambiguous compromises on issues ranging from missile defense, arms control, and NATO enlargement, as well as measures to stabilize the EU-Russia energy relationship, could help lay the foundations of a European security system guaranteeing the security interests, as well as the independence, of all parties. It must be reckoned that NATO cannot handle all of Europe's security needs, that the European Union should bear a larger share of the continent's security burden, and that Russia has to be part of this security system if it is to be sustainable in the long term.

The chances of a new European security architecture actually being established and of US-Europe-Russia relations being recast in a cooperative mould depend on many variables, the most important being the determination of all parties to pursue this ambitious goal. Cohesion at the transatlantic as well as the EU level is indispensable, but compromises should narrow rather than hide differences.

This paper is based on the premise that Russia has an objective interest in seeking cooperation with the United States and European countries., The leadership in Moscow might have a different opinion, however, and calculate that reconstituting a Soviet-like sphere of influence around Russia's European borders serves its security interests better. By pro-actively engaging with Russia on the issues to which it is most susceptible, the United States and EU member states could be more effective than by

confronting it. They would address Moscow's legitimate concerns while demanding that it behaves responsibly. An unresponsive Russia would risk condemning itself to the very condition it claims to have been fighting against in the last years, that of being excluded and contained.

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