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HOW DOES RUSSIA CONCEIVE OF THE  
MEDITERRANEAN SPACE IN ITS OFFICIAL  
DISCOURSE AND NARRATIVES?  
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Nicolás de Pedro



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Nicolás de Pedro<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The Middle East is not among the priorities of the Russian foreign policy agenda, but the region plays both now and historically a central role in Moscow's calculus. This is mainly related to Russia's aspiration to enjoy a Great Power status. The Mediterranean does not constitute the basis for defining and conceptualizing a region in the strategic thinking of the Russian Federation. In fact Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is the prevalent term in the official documents. Russia's official discourse does not coincide with that of the European Union. There are some potential complementarities when it comes to security and stability, but strategic distrust will prevail in the foreseeable future. Moscow presents itself as a stability-provider confronting the West. Hence there is a limited ground for effective and meaningful cooperation despite apparent shared goals of fighting terrorism or preventing further destabilization.

### INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean does not constitute the basis for defining and conceptualizing a region in the strategic thinking of the Russian Federation. In fact, throughout all the official documents adopted since President Putin's accession to power on the eve of the 21st century, the term "Mediterranean" as such is used only once, in the Foreign Policy concept adopted in June 2000. "*Blizhnyem vostoke i severnoi Afrike*", which can be translated literally as "Middle East and North Africa" (MENA), is the prevalent term in these official documents. The formula privileges either a geopolitical or ethno-religious (Arab-Islamic) angle.

In stark contrast to the EU, particularly the Member States located in the South, Russia does not conceive of the region as "neighbouring". Neither it is perceived as part of a common past or shared heritage. It is worth noting that – unlike the Baltic, Azov, Black or Caspian seas whose names in Russian are quite similar to the main European versions – the Russian name for the Mediterranean Sea (*Sredizemnomorskoye more*) differs completely.

Furthermore, while the Middle East is not among the priorities of the Russian foreign policy agenda, the region plays both now and historically a central role in Moscow's calculus. The relation of the Middle East with Russia's identity building and self-perception as a Great Power partly explains this central role, as the region is mainly seen as a key playground in Great Powers competition. Since the arrival of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin, Russia's role and activities have steadily grown, building to – mostly as a result of Russia's intervention in Syria – a central position in the geopolitics of the Middle East.

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1 Nicolás de Pedro is Research Fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB).

## 1. THE PARADOXICAL CENTRAL ROLE PLAYED BY A REGION OFFICIALLY OF SECONDARY RELEVANCE

Russia is the largest country in the world. The “Wider Europe” idea is at the heart of Russia’s identity, national interests and foreign policy priorities. But its huge Eurasian landmass is, to different degrees, part of the Caucasus, Inner Asia and Asia-Pacific regions as well. Furthermore, South Asia, the Near and Middle East are part of its traditional area of projection. And on top of that, Russia’s permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council confers global outreach.

This unique situation implies that arguably Russia has multiple and diverse national priorities, not all of which can be considered as strategic imperatives for the Kremlin. The former Soviet republics (and particularly the European ones), the relationship with the European Union, the United States (US) and China are the main priorities of Russia’s current foreign agenda. The Middle East is not among them, but the region plays both now and historically a central role in Moscow’s calculus. Middle East’s link with Russia’s identity building and self-perception as a Great Power partly explains this central role. Furthermore, Moscow attaches huge relevance to being acknowledged as such by other Great Powers, particularly the US and to a lesser degree the EU. Self and Others’ perception as a Great Power is a key feature of the Russian mainstream strategic mindset across time, and has far reaching implications.

The realist State-centred approach is persistently dominant among the Russian strategic community. In line with its authoritarian tradition, the decision-making process in Russia today is highly centralized in the hands of the President, who has extensive powers and capacity both in domestic and foreign policies. According to the current Constitution adopted in 1993, the President determines “the guidelines of the internal and foreign policies of the State” (Art. 80 para 3), “represent[s] the country] in international relations” (Art. 80 para 4); “appoint[s] diplomatic representatives” (Art. 83 para l); “govern[s] the foreign policy” (Art. 86 para a); “sign[s] international treaties” (Art. 86 para b); and “shall be the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” (Art. 87 para 1). Despite these Constitutional provisions, the level of coordination among different Russian actors and State bodies (President, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Duma and Security Council) is an open and recurrent debate.

Since President Putin came to office in 2000, Russia has adopted three Foreign Policy concepts (June 2000, February 2013, December 2016); three National Security strategies (January 2000, May 2009, December 2015); and two Military doctrines (April 2000, December 2014). These documents represent successive attempts to conceptualize, organize and guide the Russian foreign policy, and will be the primary sources analysed in this section of the paper.

As has been pointed out, the Mediterranean is not the basis for defining and conceptualizing a region in the strategic thinking of the Russian Federation. “*Blizhnem vostoke i sebernoii Afrike*”, which can be translated literally as “Middle East and North Africa” (MENA), is the prevalent term in these official documents. Therefore, Moscow adopts a formula coinciding with the preferred Euro-Atlantic approach to the region. The formula privileges either a geopolitical or ethno-religious (Arab-Islamic) angle. Depending on the issue, the region can extend from Morocco to Iran, but normally the term Middle East is used as a single entity including Iran and occasionally Turkey. When “and North Africa” is added, the formula attempts to encompass

Libya and Algeria, i.e., the traditional allies of Russia in the area. The marginal role played by the Mediterranean as a signifier to conceptualize a region is in stark contrast with the Caspian and the Black Seas, which are both central to articulating their respective regions.

Both the Tsarist and the Soviet Empires had direct borders with the Middle East and, at different periods, intense rivalry over the region with other Great Powers. The 19th century witnessed the expansion of the Russian Empire in all directions. A guaranteed access to warm seas, mostly through the Black Sea–Mediterranean axis, was among the headline goals of the Tsarist policy. That implied ports – mainly Sevastopol – and access through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. This brought Moscow into direct confrontation with the Ottoman Empire, France and the United Kingdom. The alliance of these three powers inflicted on Russia a serious defeat in the Crimean War of 1853–56. Russia's position in the Black Sea was severely weakened and Moscow reoriented its efforts towards Central Asia, with the Indian British Raj on the horizon. The 1907 Anglo–Russian Agreement put an end to the so-called British–Russian Great Game and established exclusive spheres of influence in Iran and Afghanistan for them.

The Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war altered Moscow's agenda, at least initially. In the famous international congress held in Baku in September 1920 the new Soviet authority made it clear its support for the revolutionary forces in the Islamic world under "Western imperialist rule". This policy included the failed attempt to synthesize Islam and Marxist doctrine by Mirza Sultan-Galiev. Gradually the Soviet Union adopted a less revolutionary and more conventional geopolitical approach towards the Middle East and the Arab world in general. However, the success of revolutionary nationalist movements in the 1950s and 60s in Arab countries like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Libya gave new impetus to the ideological dimension of the Soviet foreign policy. Soviet Central Asia – Tashkent in particular – was used as mirror to demonstrate the compatibility between Islam and the Marxist–Leninist ideology and practice. While not entirely for ideological reasons, throughout the Cold War period the Soviet Union backed all Arab countries that confronted the US and to lesser degree Israel, which occupied and still occupies a particularly complex place in the Russian strategic mindset. Therefore, during the Soviet period the Arab conservative monarchies in the Gulf, Near East and North Africa were at odds with Moscow.

The collapse of the Soviet Union entailed the independence of the South Caucasus and Central Asian republics and left Russia with no borders with the Middle East. Moscow's diminished capacities and ambitions during the 90s reduced its interests and presence in the region. Boris Yeltsin, distancing from the traditional Soviet line, tried to make inroads into the Gulf countries, seeing them as a potential source of financial support at a time when Russia was facing dire straits. The region was no longer an area in which to spread the geopolitical clout of Russia, but mainly a potential source of risks and threats for Russia herself. Therefore, to prevent tensions and conflicts in the Middle East that could spread into the Caucasus and Central Asia and from there to Russia was among the top priorities of Moscow's foreign policy in the early 90s. The significant debts with the Soviet Union incurred by its traditional Arab partners – particularly Iraq, Syria and Libya – burdened the bilateral relationship during this period.

Since the arrival of Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin, Russia's role and activities have steadily grown, now holding – mostly as a result of its intervention in Syria – a central place in the geopolitics of the Middle East. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Putin attempted to align Russia with the "War on Terror" campaign launched by the Bush Jr. Administration. However, the invasion of

Iraq in 2003 and the wave of colour revolutions in the former Soviet space – Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan – deeply irritated Moscow. Since then, the Kremlin has been convinced that the West is pursuing a regime-change agenda in the Eurasian space that aims to overthrow the Russian regime as well.

Strategic distrust was exacerbated with the Arab Spring in 2011. The initial sympathy showed by the then President Medvedev triggered a crisis within the Kremlin and, according to some unofficial sources, pushed Putin's anticipated return to the Presidency. In the mind of the so-called *siloviki* (those surrounding Putin with security services background), the Arab Spring was connected to the wave of protest in Moscow after the parliamentary election of December 2011. From their perspective, both were masterminded by the West. Furthermore, the Kremlin felt betrayed by the West in Libya. Russia abstained in the Security Council vote for Resolution 1973 which, in accordance with the principle of the "responsibility to protect", allowed for the establishment of no-fly zone in Western Libya. France and the UK went far beyond the mandate and ended up contributing decisively to the overthrow of Gaddafi.

Partly as a reaction to Libya, the Kremlin decided to reinforce its diplomatic backing of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, fearing that any Western initiative to protect the Syrian civilians was simply a covert attempt to overthrow the regime at the expense of Russian interests – the Tartus resupply naval base, Soviet debts and weaponry supply contracts. In September 2015 President Putin addressed the UN General Assembly and blamed the West for the chaos in the Middle East and Libya in particular. A few days later, Russia deployed jet fighters and anti-aircraft missile systems in Syria, altering dramatically the balance of power of the war and the diplomatic context for its resolution.

## 2. THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPTS

### 2.1 THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (JUNE 2000)

The Foreign Policy Concept of June 2000 was the first adopted under the presidency of Vladimir Putin. The document is a good reflection of the prevalent mood and views in Russia at the beginning of Putin's presidency. The 90s were traumatic for many in Russia, and on the threshold of the 21st century ambitions were rather modest. The main concerns expressed in its General Principles are related to protecting Russia while retaining its relevant international role and ensuring the (much needed at the time) domestic economic development. The insistence on cooperation with partners and friendly relations with neighbours stands out.

In the first section, entitled "General Principles", the document says that "the uppermost priority of the foreign policy course of Russia is to protect the interests of the individual and the society [aiming to establish] new, equitable and mutually advantageous partnership relations of Russia with the rest of the world". Thus, the main priority is

to ensure reliable security of the country, to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community, most fully consistent with the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power, as one of the most influential centers of the modern world, and which are necessary for

the growth of its political, economic, intellectual and spiritual potential.

The economic aspects are emphasized several times as the document aims to

create favorable external conditions for steady development of Russia, for improving its economy, enhancing the standards of living of the population, successfully carrying out democratic transformations, strengthening the basis of the constitutional system and observing individual rights and freedoms.

Section II elaborates on how Russia sees the modern world and the place of its foreign policy within it. The concept is built upon the premise that the world "is going through fundamental and dynamic changes that profoundly affect the interests of the Russian Federation and its citizens". And what Russia fears most is "the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with the economic and power domination of the United States"; which implies "weakening the role of the U.N. Security Council". Therefore "Russia shall seek to achieve a multi-polar system of international relations that really reflects the diversity of the modern world with its great variety of interests".

Section III outlines the main priorities which, in line with the views mentioned in the previous section, are: 1) "Forming a new world order [based on] strict observance of the fundamental principles in the U.N. Charter, including the preservation of the status of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council"; 2) "Strengthening international security"; and 3) "to promote the development of the national economy, which, in conditions of globalization, is unthinkable without broad integration of Russia in the system of world economic ties". It is worth mentioning that the document retains some sort of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric when it talks about the "international division of labor".

Regional priorities are outlined in Section IV. In line with what has been explained before, "the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)" are ranked in first place and the emphasis is put "on the development of good neighbourly relations and strategic partnership". Among them, the union of Belarus and Russia is singled out as the "priority task".

The document goes on to say that "relations with European states is Russia's traditional foreign policy priority". On Europe, the Concept of 2000 insists on "the further balanced development of the multi-functional character of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)" which means that "Russia will strongly oppose the narrowing down of the OSCE functions, specifically the attempts to redirect its specialized activities to the post-Soviet space and the Balkans".

Reflecting both the strained relations after NATO's operation in Kosovo in April 1999 and the attempt of President Putin to align with the US-led "War on Terror", the document mildly says that

NATO's present-day political and military guidelines do not coincide with security interests of the Russian Federation and occasionally directly contradict them. This primarily concerns the provisions of NATO's new strategic concept, which do not exclude the conduct of use-of-force operations outside of the zone of application of the Washington Treaty without the sanction of the UN Security Council.

As a good indicator of the completely different views and context of 2000 compared to the current day, the document indicates that "There are good prospects for the development of the Russian Federation's relations with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Russia stands for putting these relation[s] onto the track of good neighborliness and mutual cooperation".

Asia, specifically China and India, but also regional organizations like ASEAN and fora like the Shanghai Five are mentioned as the next regional priorities for the Russian foreign policy.

When it comes to MENA, the document states that "Russia will work to stabilize the situation in the Middle East, including the Persian Gulf zone and Northern Africa, taking into account the impact which the situation in the region has on the situation the world over". It points out that "It is important to develop further relations with Iran".

And reflecting the bid for a cooperative approach emphasizing economic and development issues, the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 says that

Viewing the Greater Mediterranean as a hub of such regions as the Middle East, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea basin, Russia intends to steer a purposeful course toward for turning it into a zone of peace, stability and good neighborliness, something that will help advance Russian economic interests, including in the matter of the choice of routes for important energy flows.

As has been noted, this is the only mention of the Mediterranean throughout these documents. This is unfortunate considering that the approach adopted for the region in 2000 was very much in line with the goals outlined in the EU's neighbourhood policy.

## 2.2 THE CONCEPT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (FEBRUARY 2013)

*The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* of February 2013 brings in a new vision of the country's priorities "taking into account Russia's increased responsibility for setting the international agenda and shaping the system of international relations". Thus, a main focus is "securing [Russia's] high standing in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles of the modern world". Its paragraph 25 claims that "Russia's foreign policy is transparent, predictable and pragmatic" and paragraph 26 makes plain that "Russia is fully aware of its special responsibility for maintaining security in the world both on the global and regional levels".

The document builds on the premise that "the ability of the West to dominate world economy and politics continues to diminish" and thus, says paragraph 6, "the emergence of new global economic and political actors with Western countries trying to preserve their traditional positions enhances global competition, which is manifested in growing instability in international relations".

For the first time, the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept introduces the civilizational dimension in its reasoning – something which was absent in the 2000 text. This new identified factor is presented as grounds for world competition and confrontation whereby "various values and

models of development based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy start to clash and compete against each other". As a reverse side to this globalized process of diversity, the document stresses the dangers of a "desire to go back to one's civilizational roots" that "can be clearly seen in recent events in the Middle East and North Africa where political and socioeconomic renewal of society has been frequently carried out under the banner of asserting Islamic values" (para 14).

Among the "Priorities for Addressing Global Problems", another novelty comparing with the 2000 Concept is the specification of the importance of the maritime dimension, resuming Russia's traditional interest in being (and being recognized as) a naval power. The document states that indeed another priority is "an effective use of sea and ocean spaces in view of their growing importance in terms of ensuring both economic development and security" (para 38). Therefore – and more so because of the current troubles – the Mediterranean appears logically in the focus of Russian interest as a world power. Against this backdrop, Moscow "will work to promote relevant regimes in the areas of safe navigation, including maritime piracy control, responsible fisheries and ocean-related scientific research, in combination with measures to protect maritime environment and combat international terrorism".

This is in line with the statement made by Mikhail Nenashev, Chairman of the All-Russia Fleet Support Movement, in January 2017, when he told RIA Novosti that Russia had to "finalize the issue of infrastructure development with regard to a full-scale base of the Russian Navy in Tartus and work on the possibility of deploying our ships to Latakia, the key port of the Syrian Arab Navy".<sup>2</sup>

This concern for security is developed in paragraph 15 which claims that "some concepts that are being implemented are aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting civilian population". This approach sheds a clarifying light on Russia's strong negative reaction, from the very beginning, to the events of the Arab Spring.

The civilizational criteria appear again in the chapter dealing with regional priorities, where priority is given to the Euro-Atlantic states "which, besides geography, economy and history, have common deep-rooted civilizational ties with Russia" (para 54).

When it comes to the MENA region, paragraph 88 claims that

Russia will be making a meaningful contribution to the stabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa and will consistently promote peace and concord among the peoples of all the Middle East and North Africa countries on the basis of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of states and non-interference in their internal affairs.

The same paragraph elaborates more specifically on Russia's policy towards the Arab Israeli conflict:

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<sup>2</sup> See "Always on Guard: Russia 'Can Reinforce Its Task Force in the Med at Any Time'", in *Sputnik News*, 7 January 2017, <https://sptnkne.ws/dkkM>.



Using its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of the Quartet of international mediators, Russia will further mobilize collective efforts to achieve, on an internationally acceptable basis, a comprehensive and long-term settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in all its aspects, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian State living in peace and security side by side with Israel. The settlement should be reached through negotiation with the assistance of the international community, involving the potential of the League of Arab States and other parties concerned. Russia will promote the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means in the Middle East.

The only other country specified in the MENA region is, not surprisingly, Iran, where "Russia will continue its balanced policy in favor of a comprehensive political and diplomatic settlement of the situation with Iranian nuclear program". To that end, Moscow will operate "through dialogue based on a step-by-step and mutual interest approach and in strict compliance with nuclear non-proliferation requirements" (para 89).

Finally, paragraph 90 states that in its striving

To further enhance its interaction with the Islamic states, Russia will take advantage of its participation as an observer in the work of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and its contacts with the League of Arab States and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

And in accordance with a much-preferred strategy when it comes to regional politics, the same paragraph concludes recalling that "Russia is willing to further develop its bilateral relations with the states in the Middle East and North Africa".

### 2.3 FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (NOVEMBER 2016)

The Foreign Policy Concept adopted in November 2016 contains continuity but clear ruptures as well. In stark contrast to the Concept adopted in June 2000, confidence, assertiveness and, mainly, confrontation with the West are the backbone of the document. The document reflects the views and policies of Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of its military intervention in Syria.

This document also builds upon the idea that the "world is currently going through fundamental changes related to the emergence of a multipolar international system", and it assumes that "global power and development potential is becoming decentralized, and is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance of the traditional western powers" (para 4).

Now Russia sees a more dangerous world and indicates that "Tensions are rising due to disparities in global development" (para 5) and

Force is becoming an increasingly important factor in international relations amid escalating political, social and economic contradictions and growing uncertainty in the global political system and economy. Efforts to expand and upgrade military capabilities and to create and deploy new types of weapons undermine strategic

stability and pose a threat to global security [...]. Although a large-scale war, including nuclear war, between major powers remains unlikely, they face increased risks of being drawn into regional conflicts and escalating crises. (para 6).

International terrorism is identified as "one of the most dangerous realities in today's world" and MENA as the most affected region in terms of "spread of extremist ideology and the activity of terrorist groups". Without mentioning it explicitly, the document clearly blames the West for destabilizing the region, stating that "[e]xternal interference has also played a major role" and has "led to the destruction of traditional governance and security mechanisms [...]. The ideological values and prescriptions imposed from outside these countries in an attempt to modernize their political systems have exacerbated the negative response of their societies to current challenges. (para 14)

As in previous documents, Russia insists on the idea that "the UN should maintain its central role in regulating international relations and coordinating world politics in the 21st century" (para 24) and in line with this "advocates strengthening the legal foundation of international relations [...]. Maintaining and strengthening international rule of law is among its priorities in the international arena" (para 26). At that point, the document again implicitly blames the West as Russia intends

to counter attempts by some States or groups of States to revise the generally accepted principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter [aiming] to interfere in the domestic affairs of States with the aim of unconstitutional change of regime, including by supporting non-State actors, such as terrorist and extremist groups. (para 26b)

Likewise and in the light of the Libyan precedent and Russian deployment in Syria, Moscow intends "to prevent military interventions or other forms of outside interference contrary to international law, specifically the principle of sovereign equality of States, under the pretext of implementing the 'responsibility to protect' concept" (para 26c). The second explicit mention of the Middle East is related to Russia's support for "the creation of zones free from nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction" (para 27i).

It is remarkable and quite telling that when it comes to international humanitarian cooperation and human rights issues, the document again puts the focus on the West and its alleged regime-change strategy. Thus, Russia aims "to counter attempts to use human rights theories to exert political pressure and interfere in internal affairs of States, including with a view to destabilizing them and overthrowing legitimate governments" (para 45b).

The fourth section of the document outlines the regional foreign policy priorities of the Russian Federation. As in previous documents the member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are singled out as the main priority for Russia (para 49). In the subsequent paragraphs (50–60), the document insists on the critical relevance of this region for Russia mentioning Belarus, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Ukraine, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Afterwards, the document elaborates on the tensions and problems triggered by "the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU)" (para 61–68). Canada and the Arctic are mentioned, before moving on

to Asia-Pacific and referring to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, India, Mongolia, Japan, the two Koreas, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand (para 78–91).

Only then does the document jump to MENA, emphasizing that

Russia will continue making a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, supporting collective efforts aimed at neutralizing threats that emanate from international terrorist groups, consistently promotes political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts in regional States while respecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity and the right to self-determination without outside interference. (para 92)

The West is again implicitly mentioned and characterized as an “outside interference”. Unsurprisingly, Syria and Iran are singled out as the two main partners in the region.

Finally, Russia intends “to further expand bilateral relations with the States in the Middle East and North Africa, including by relying on the ministerial meeting of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum, and continuing strategic dialogue with the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf” and “will take advantage of its participation as an observer in the work of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation with a view to further expanding relations with countries of the Islamic world, and promoting partnerships with them in various areas” (para 95–96).

### 3. THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES

#### 3.1 NATIONAL SECURITY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (JANUARY 2000)

The *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation* of 2000 is the main document related to foreign affairs of the Russian Federation at the beginning of the new century. It frames the basis on which to conceptualize the foreign policy of the Kremlin for the following years.

As is stated in the second paragraph – and as implied in the title – by “national security is meant the security of its multinational people as the bearer of sovereignty and as the only source of power in the Russian Federation”. The concept of security is thus the central issue of the renewed policy strategy, and is employed as a means to address upcoming international threats.

The first part of the document is built on the idea of positioning Russia in the new global community. After the end of the “bipolar confrontation era” (para 3), Russia has to adapt itself to – and even counteract – the forthcoming tendencies of the Western World, especially those related to “weaken[ing] Russia politically, economically, militarily and in other ways” (para 9) or even “ignor[ing] Russia’s interests when resolving major issues in international relations” ( para 9).

The second part focuses on Russia’s national interests. These are divided into three spheres: individual, social and state interests. Even though they have different scopes, there is a common

trend among them vis-à-vis the international dimension. The leading aim is to "strengthening its positions as a great power and as one of the influential centers of a multipolar world" (para 18). This status as leading international actor is integrated with the national interest of "preservation and strengthening of society's moral values, traditions of patriotism and humanism" (para 17), thereby demonstrating Russia's interest in preserving its "core values" while expanding its influence after a long and tedious absence.

When addressing the threats to and safeguards of Russia's national security, terrorism appears as one of the issues on the agenda, notably as it is seen to be used to destabilize Russia.

In this Concept Paper, the Middle East appears only as a region of Russian influence. Attempts by other states to reduce this influence are seen as creating a threat for Russia's own interests. The MENA region or just North Africa are not mentioned. This indicates that the region as a whole was not yet a priority for Moscow. Other areas such as Europe, Asia-Pacific and Central Asia were acknowledged as well. This also reveals a shifting interest from Russia and an expanding area of influence in the years to come. The rhetoric at the beginning of the century was concentrated on counterbalancing other states' actions and repositioning Russia as a main influencer in the new multipolar world that was being shaped from the convergence and integration of some of its neighbours – Europe and NATO – as well as the rise of different multidimensional hazards throughout the globe.

### 3.2 RUSSIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY TO 2020 (MAY 2009)

The *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*, approved in May 2009, is clearly a "Medvedev-time" document, building on the underlying idea of "human security". Thus "investing in human capital", as stated in paragraph 24, is viewed as a priority for national security. This approach, related to the notion of a social development model, was very much in vogue during Medvedev's presidency. The same is true for the repeated reference to "civil society", a phrase that appears only in very specifically chosen moments in Putin-era documents.

The first appealing difference of the 2009 National Security Strategy compared to the National Security Concept approved in January 2000 is that it is much more focused on the domestic dimension of the State's challenges. Whereas the 2000 document starts with "Russia in the world community", in 2009 this dimension occurs only in the otherwise very short chapter II. The document states from the beginning that

the preconditions for reinforcing the system of national security have been created, and the relevant legal space has been consolidated. Priority issues in the economic sphere have been resolved, and the attractiveness of the economy for investment has grown. Authentically Russian ideals and spirituality are being born, alongside a dignified attitude to historical memory.

This quite triumphalist view is developed in detail all through the document.

In the international arena, priority is giving to the relations with the US, the West and NATO in general, underlining that "values and models of development have become the subject of global competition" (para 8). The MENA region is largely absent from this strategy document

and is acknowledged mainly in relation to the energy resources issue. It does appear cited among other regions in paragraph 11, which states that "in the long term, the attention of international politics will be focused on ownership of energy resources, including in the Near East, the Barents Sea shelf and other parts of the Arctic, in the Caspian basin, and in Central Asia", while the conflict dimension appears in the medium-term prospect where "the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as conflicts in the Near and Middle East, in a number of South Asian and African countries, and on the Korean peninsula, will continue to exert a negative influence on the international situation".

The dominant trend of the document in the international framework tries quite clearly to avoid confrontational approaches, as specified in paragraph 89:

The achievement of the Russian Federation's priorities for stable development is supported by an active foreign policy, whose efforts are focused on seeking agreement and common interests with other states, on the basis of a system of bilateral and multilateral mutually beneficial partnership relations.

## 4. THE MILITARY DOCTRINES

After developing the *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation* in January 2000, the Kremlin continued its new security and foreign affairs reconceptualization through its military doctrine. The doctrine is built on the precepts of the Basic Guidelines for the Russian Federation's Military Doctrine of 1993. The 2000 military doctrine, as well as the version presented in 2014, envisages terrorism as one of the major menaces, mentioned throughout both documents. However, neither the MENA region nor the Middle East are present in these two papers. The exclusion of the area demonstrates the intention of Moscow to generalize the concept of "terrorism" in order to avoid relating it to a particular narrative, thus being able to exploit it in different circumstances when necessary. Terrorism is clearly an important issue in Russia's agenda, but it is not seen as limited to the area of the Middle East, thus opening the door to potential military interventions in other areas – even locally.

## CONCLUSIONS

Russia's policies towards the Mediterranean collide with those of the EU. While Moscow regards supporting authoritarian regimes as a means of preserving regional order, the EU's discourse in the past years has focused on drawing attention to social unrest and democratic will. However, the situation since the Arab revolutions and their ultimate failure to attain their initially stated goals and objectives, have affected the EU's vision towards the region and its subsequent approach. The EU's vision does not intend to impose any particular agenda in the region; its main goal is to maintain peace and continue the development efforts in these countries, as it conceives of its neighbours as key to improvement of the wider region – including the EU itself. The Mediterranean is pivotal to the EU's foreign policy objectives. And as such, plenty of resources, both human and capital, are pouring to the area. The EU has been following an agenda of non-political intervention but it is the main source of development aid, thereby increasing its soft power. However, the EU's foreign policy has been constantly

struggling to deal with non-state actors as well as to understand the dynamics and power blocks of the Mediterranean.

Moscow has a different conceptualization of the state of affairs in the Mediterranean; it has pushed forward an agenda of preserving its alliances and further enhancing some of them while actively enrolling in certain regional disputes. This has consequently stimulated some animosity among the states and instrumental forces in the region, but it has as well shifted the country towards a more central position such that it is almost essential in some of today's conflicts. Through military cooperation, Moscow has become an ally for some and an enemy for others, but the underpinning idea is that the Kremlin does play a role in the region.

As we have seen, the policies of the EU and Russia in the Mediterranean are based on completely opposite premises and in some cases even conflicting ones. While the EU promotes open societies and accommodates minorities and repressed groups, Moscow fosters its view on traditional values as the fundamental channel to its foreign policy; there is no narrative in respect to empowerment of women and minorities in Russia's foreign political discourse. Moreover, fundamental concepts in the EU's agenda such as climate change, agricultural development or migration and mobility are completely absent from Russia's scheme for the Mediterranean. There is no evident engagement in any of these issues on the part of the Kremlin and no prospects of such in the near future. It is clearly a very policy-specific region for Moscow and this policy differs quite substantially from the intent of the EU.

These two opposite visions are competing for space in the same region, which is struggling with sectarianism and political turmoil. The strategies diverge in their implementation – soft power vs. military intervention – and have had different outcomes. Moscow's active enrolment in the Mediterranean has substantially improved its negotiation power and strengthened its international image as an essential speaker. Conversely, the EU's soft power has not procured the expected outcome and has even left the union as a secondary actor in the shadow of international bigger players.

In sum, Russia's conception of the Mediterranean in its official discourse does not coincide with that of the EU. This is the main conclusion that can be extracted from reviewing the major official position documents of Moscow. There are some potential *complementarities* when it comes to security and stability, but strategic distrust will prevail in the foreseeable future. The rift between the European Union and Russia runs deep and Moscow is positioning itself in the MENA region as a counterbalance to the West. In the Kremlin's view, as a follow-up of the Arab Spring, the West – which means mainly the US but also the EU – is pursuing a destabilizing agenda aiming to overthrow some regional authoritarian regimes. Moscow thus presents itself as a stability-provider *confronting* the West. Hence there is a limited ground for effective and meaningful cooperation despite apparent shared goals of fighting terrorism or preventing further destabilization.

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# MED RESET

مِد ريسټ



Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)  
Via Angelo Brunetti 9  
I-00186 Roma

Tel. +39-063224360  
Fax +39-063224363

[iaia@iaia.it](mailto:iaia@iaia.it) | [www.iaia.it](http://www.iaia.it)



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