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Russia and the Nordic region: challenges and prospects for cooperation between the EU and Russia

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Abstract

The article argues that it is in Russia's interests that current security constellation in the Nordic region is maintained. Russia opposes NATO enlargement, but wants to ensure that internal stability of the region is preserved. Russia is also interested of joint technology projects with the Nordic countries that may server modernization of Russian economy. Yet, Russia's attempts to

project its power abroad may, in fact, undermine the status quo. It cannot be excluded that in the future inter-regional cooperation will be re-politicized in one form or another and further marginalized. Much depends on Russia's internal development and whether the threat perceptions diverge even further apart.

Introduction

In this article I explore Russia's interests in the Nordic region in the framework of wider EU-Russia relations.

It can be argued that the Nordic region's security challenge consists of three basic factors : the unresolved issue of the NATO enlargement, an emergence of (soft) authoritarianism in Russia, and the problem of critical infrastructure protection in the Nordic-Baltic region and beyond. The purpose here is to elaborate on security challenges stemming from the combination of these factors.

An article published in 2003, summarizes nicely the basic starting points. In that article Pavel Baev argued that "in the Nordic-Baltic area Russia is most firmly anchored to the emerging new European security order through well-developed institutional frameworks". The "dilemma of East-West appears irrelevant for Russia's prospects in this direction", Baev noted and continued: "the soul searching Eurasian ideas do not seem to make much sense here". According to Baev, this is the potential source of a major political crisis and something that would result in blocking cooperation is the next round of NATO enlargement. The fact that this issue remains to be unresolved "poisons the political atmosphere", Baev argued back in 2003. Moreover, due to this "hidden and postponed crisis", military-to-military connections are poor. On the other hand, not enough attention is paid in the West "to the increasing problems of Russia's vast nuclear arsenal in the Far North".¹

Now, ten years later, the three Baltic States are members of NATO and the prospect of membership is openly debated both in Sweden and Finland.² The "Eurasian civilization" argument has appeared to Russian foreign policy parlance and it is actively used in projecting Russia as an alternative to the West.³ What

seems to have gone unchanged is the general lack of attention devoted to Russia's vast nuclear arsenal. This issue is sporadically addressed as a matter of safety that may hamper the use of the Northern Sea Route, an example of 'weakness' of the Russian State, or, on the contrary, a basis on which the maintaining and modernization of the Russia's military presence in the region can be legitimated.

Surfacing to the public sphere of what previously was hidden has brought to fore a question whether Russia's anchoring to the emerging new European security order *through the Nordic-Baltic region* has proved to be a day-dream? In his article cited above, Baev left this possibility open. Describing the Nordic-Baltic area as Russia's "window to Europe" and a place for cooperation as well as challenges, Baev identified a possibility that Russia's inaction and lack of interest to grasp the opportunities will narrow this window into a "mere peep-hole". In fact, Baev concludes his analysis by arguing that:

*"It is in the north-west that Russia has its greatest opportunities to confirm and reinforce its European identity, but it also remains perfectly capable of cutting itself off and continuing to slide down in what looks like a spiral of self-destruction"*⁴.

In early 2000 it seemed that either of these options could materialize. Russia's engagement in the regional level cooperation in the North was viewed as an opportunity both for the EU and Russia. Acknowledging the mistakes made in the 1990s, Russia put emphasis on the transfer of technology from the west and modernization of economy and social spheres along the lines of European/western experience.⁵

In the current Russian official parlance a link between Europeanization and modernization is severed, and instead, it is the Eurasian vector that seems to promise a "window of opportunity" for Russia. Whether this is a real possibility or not, is another matter. The question put forward in this article is what implications this shift may have for Russia's engagement in the Nordic-Baltic region? Whether Russia's interests, and the ways in which it pursues them in the Nordic region, further complicate already strained EU-

1. Baev, Pavel (2003): "Opportunities and challenges for Russia in the Nordic-Baltic region". In Gorodetsky, Gabriel (ed.): *Russia between East and West. Russian Foreign Policy on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*. London & Portland, OR: Frank Cass, p. 99.

2. Salenius-Pasternak, Charly (2013): "Swedish defence illusions are crumbling: the changes in Swedish defence policy necessitate a debate about NATO prior to the Finnish parliamentary elections in 2015". *FIIA Comment* n° 6. http://www.fia.fi/fi/publication/326/swedish_defence_illusions_are_crumbing/#.UqWFqelw92g

3. Kaljurand, Riina and Maria Mälksoo (2009): "From de-securitisation to re-securitisation. Sub-regional multilateralism around the Baltic Sea". Analysis, International Center for Defence Studies. <http://icds.ee/>

fileadmin/failid/Sub-regional%20multilateralism%20around%20the%20Baltic%20Sea.pdf

4. Baev (2003), p. 108.

5. Pynnöniemi, Katri (2010): "The political constraints on Russia's economic development: the visionary zeal of technological modernization and its critics". *FIIA Working Paper* n° 65, June 2010. http://www.fia.fi/fi/publication/127/the_political_constraints_on_russia_s_economic_development/#.UqWADuIw92g

Russia relations or could the region maintain its status as an exception – a ground for cooperation instead of conflict?

Russian researchers Irina Busygina and Mikhail Filippov have suggested what they call “counter-intuitive trade off – the better the economic relations, the more conflict can be introduced in political relations”. Researchers identify two main principles of this strategy. First, the growing political tensions with the EU could be ‘compensated’ for by cooperation on other institutional levels. Second, the “content of bilateral relations and regional programs must be strictly isolated from [unresolved] issues of ‘high politics’”. As suggested by Busygina and Filippov, “regional cooperation has greatest chances of success when it deals with specifically localized and non-political EU-Russia matters”.⁶

In fact, this has been the logic applied in establishing the Northern Dimension partnerships with Russia after 1998. But is Russia still following the same logic, that is, leaving a door open for non-political regional level interaction? Or, are we witnessing a change in the general framework whereby the region is perceived as a ‘space for geopolitical games’? Some have suggested that in fact, Russia is following the logic of ‘hyber-competition’ whereby it is using a mixture of hard and soft means to get what it wants. As put by James Sherr, “those who believe that the West faces a choice between ‘partnership’ and ‘confrontation’ with Russia will be outmaneuvered systematically”. In his view, Russia has adopted “Leninist methodology”⁷ a characteristic feature which involves a certain incongruity of means in achieving the ends.⁸ But what is it that Russia wants from the Nordic region? We may suppose that it is in Russia’s interests to keep things as they are at the moment.⁹ Meaning that no NATO enlargement in the North, but maintenance of the Nordic development model to ensure internal stability of the region, and establishment of joint technology projects where it servers moderni-

6. Busygina, Irina, and Mikhail Filippov (2008): “End Comment: EU-Russian relations and the limits of the Northern Dimension”, in Aalto et. all., op. cit., p. 205.

7. Here by Leninist methodology is meant an idea that in a revolutionary situation all means should be used.

8. Sherr, James (2013): *Hard diplomacy and soft coercion. Russia's influence abroad*. London: Chatham House. p. 113.

9. This applies to Russian policy towards the EU in general and the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood, in particular. See e.g. Zagorski, Andrei (2013): “Russia and the European Union: looking back and looking ahead”. In Berterlsmann Stiftung (ed.) *From cooperation to partnership: moving beyond the Russia-EU deadlock*. Europe in Dialogue 1/2013.

zation of Russian economy. If these can be considered as general lines of thinking in Russia, their application into practice takes many forms some of which may have unintended consequences.

Contextualization of Russia’s presence in the Nordic region: three analytical frames

It is argued that we may try to contextualize Russia’s presence in the Nordic region by applying three analytical frames in terms which the EU-Russia interaction actualizes. The three analytical frames touch upon different aspects of current security environment and are here summarized as: vision of Nordic region as ‘a place like no other’, positioning it as a ‘gateway to Russia’, and thirdly, framing of the region in terms of geopolitical games.

First, the Nordic region can be viewed as ‘a place like no other’, that is, a space for exploration of new ways of interaction between Europe and Russia. The regional cooperation forums, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (1992), the Barents Euro-Artic Council (1993), the Arctic Council (1996), and the Northern Dimension initiative (1998), have provided a context for transmission, exploration and adaptation of European values and norms.¹⁰ The space of interaction is framed in terms of new security threats and explained through the comprehensive security paradigm. In this context, a clear cut division is drawn between the current situation and the cold war period. This concretizes, for example, in the on-going debate about the meaning of such notions as non-alignment and neutrality.¹¹ However, at the level of inter-regional cooperation security issues are not addressed. Rather, a non-political nature of regional cooperation in the sphere of environment protection, social reform, and infrastructure development is emphasized.¹²

Second, the Nordic-Baltic region or parts of it can be envisioned as a “*gateway to Russia*”. The role of the Nordic-Baltic region is seen as a connection point that may bring together what

10. Browning, C.S. (2003): “The region-building approach revisited. The continued othering of Russia in discourses of region-building in the European North”. *Geopolitics* Vol. 8, n° 1, p. 48.

11. See e.g. Bailes, J.K, Gunilla Herolf, Bengt Sundelius (eds.) (2006): *The Nordic Countries and the European Security and Defence Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

12. Aalto, Pami, Helge Blakkisrud and Hanna Smith (eds.) *The Northern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood*. Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies.

was previously divided.¹³ The gateway approach is based on the logic of growing global interdependency, homogenization, and market driven competition. The growing interdependency is viewed as a 'win-win' situation for the Nordic region and Russia. At the regional level, the emphasis is in trade facilitation and project based policies (e.g. in the framework of the Northern Dimension). Russia has been very consistent in its policy and favored the project based, investment oriented approach to inter-regional cooperation. What Russia has been more reluctant to embrace is the idea of *flow economy* underlying the 'gateway approach'. In the Russian discourse, ports and major nodes of Russia's raw material based economy are first and foremost subject to sovereign control and the State's task is to protect them.¹⁴

Thirdly, it has been emphasized that, in fact, "the [Nordic-Baltic] region has regained a significant geopolitical position".¹⁵ Ann-Sofie Dahl refers here to the renewed great power interests towards the Arctic, the building of a Russian gas pipeline crossing the Baltic Sea, and a build-up of the Russian naval capacity in the region.¹⁶ These factors can be interpreted as signs of a geopolitical ordering in the European North. In fact, this term "European North" is consistently used in the Russian discourse, instead of reference being made to the "Nordic region". The latter carries within it an understanding of distinctive historical-political subjectivity, whereas the "European North" is more malleable, almost diffuse term that can be used to legitimize different historical-spatial configurations of this region. The usage of this term creates simultaneously two associations – one that links the Nordic-northernness ("European North") to Russia's own identification with

13. Rytövuori-Apunen, Helena (2000): "Gateway Approach – What is it? Some Instructive Directions for a Handbook". In Rytövuori-Apunen, H. (ed.), *Russian-European Interfaces in the Northern Dimension of the EU*. Tampere: University of Tampere.

14. Pynnöniemi, Katri (2008): "EU-Russia cooperation on transport: prospects for the Northern Dimension transport partnership". In Aalto, Pami et. al., op. cit., pp. 116-120.

15. Dahl, Ann-Sofie (2014): "Security in the Nordic-Baltic region: from Cold War to a unipolar world". In Dahl, A.S. and Pauli Järvenpää (eds.) *Northern Security and Global Politics. Nordic-Baltic strategic influence in a post-unipolar world*. London & NY: Routledge. p. 67.

16. See also Kaljurand, Riina, K. Neretnieks, B. Liung and J. Tupay (2012): *Developments in the security environment of the Baltic Sea region up to 2020*. International Center for Defence, Report, September 2012. <http://icds.ee/fileadmin/failid/Developments%20in%20the%20Security%20Environment%20of%20the%20Baltic%20Sea%20Region%20up%20to%202020.pdf>.

the North, and another that undermines subjectivity attached with the status "Nordic" (Nordic welfare state, 'Nordic balance' etc.).¹⁷ Other examples of such geopolitical framing include the notion 'wider north' that is used with reference to emerging new Arctic region, and 'greater northern region' that links together Baltic and Barents regions.¹⁸

The rest of this article is structured by these three analytical frames and purpose is to discuss in what ways and by what means Russia is actually present in the Nordic region and what sort of challenges it may create for the EU-Russia relations. The analysis is based upon previous research literature on the inter-regional cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region, and the insights drawn from the Russian foreign and security policy documents.

A place like no other? The Nordic region in the context of Russia's foreign policy

Russian foreign policy doctrine was approved by president Vladimir Putin in February 2013. It replaced an earlier version that was adopted in 2008 by then president Dmitry Medvedev. The main principles that form a foundation of Russia's foreign policy are listed as follows: independence, sovereignty, pragmatism, and transparency, together with the non-confrontational implementation of national priorities. In comparison to the 2008 version, this new doctrine includes two important items. First, Russian diplomacy should facilitate and support interests of Russian business abroad, and second, Russia will engage in defending the rights and legal interest of Russian citizens living abroad, as well as, formulation of Russia's approach to the human rights in different international forums.¹⁹ These issues are not new as such, but now they are firmly anchored as a part of Russia's foreign policy.²⁰

17. See discussion on Russia's identification with North and northernness e.g. in Honneland, Geir (2010): *Borderland Russians. Identity, Narrative and International Relations*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

18. Ibid. p. 20; Rogers, James (2013): "European and the Wider North". In Biscop, Sven and Daniel Fiott (eds.): *The State of Defence in Europe: State of Emergency?* Egmont Paper 62. The Royal Institute of International Relations.

19. Konseptsiya Vneshnei Politiki RF, 12.2.2013. Article 4, d.

20. A state policy in support of Russian's living abroad was formulated in 2010 and it can be considered as a formal starting point for more active policies in this sphere. An overview of Russia's objectives is provided in a document collected for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and titled: "In support of Russian compatriots

An importance of bilateral relations as a “resource” to be employed in support of Russia’s national interests is emphasized also in this new foreign policy doctrine. What has changed from the previous version is the list of countries considered as very important in this regard. In 2008, the list included both Finland and Norway, whereas in 2013 document, these countries are not mentioned.²¹ The European North is, however, mentioned in connection with the “further development of practical interaction” and “realization in the context of multi-lateral structures of joint projects” in the Barents Euro-Artic region and Arctic in general. It is suggested that Russia plays an important role in the framework of Barents Sea Council cooperation and is interested to further explore “project potential of the Northern Dimension”.²²

After 2006, the Northern Dimension was re-established as a collaborative network of equal partners including Russia, Norway, Iceland and the EU. The recognition of Russia as an equal partner is hoped to “facilitate the identification of overlapping interests and best practices in achieving common goals and mutual interests on two different levels”.²³ However, the changing political framework of cooperation is already reflected at the level of concrete projects, for example, the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) and the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS). Considering the latter project, it is generally acknowledged that health problems and levels of welfare are far from evenly distributed in the Northern Dimension area. For example, the divide in life expectancy between Russia and its Nordic neighbours is larger than that of any other neighbouring countries in the world. In previous years, the emphasis of the NDPHS has been on social and health problems in north-west Russia. More recently, “Russian policy-makers have stressed that they give priority to the entire Northern Dimension area instead of just the situation in Russia”. From the viewpoint of Russia, it is important to show that it is not the “weakest partner dependent on outside assistance”.²⁴

abroad 2012-2013”. Zatulín, K.F. (2013): “V Pomoch rossiiskomu sootchestvenniku za rubezhom – 2012-2013”. Institut Diaspory I Integratsii (Institut Stran SNG). Moskva.

21. Konseptsiya 2013, article 60.

22. Konseptsiya 2013, article 65.

23. Smith, Hanna (2008): “Russian foreign policy, regional cooperation and northern relations”. In Aalto, Pami, Helge Blakkisrud and Hanna Smith (eds.) *The Northern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood*. Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, 21.

24. Aasland, Aadne (2008): “Assessing the Northern

On the contrary, the internal political situation in Russia after the mass demonstrations of 2011 and 2012, has led to activation of discourses and practical policy initiatives where Russia is presented as a vanguard of Eurasian civilization and defender of non-western conservative values and norms. This turn to ‘East’ has many implications for Russia’s internal situation but also for its foreign policy. For example the status of cooperation with Russian’s living abroad (*Rossostrudichesvto*), has been upgraded in the recent years. The main activities include support for Russian culture and language, joint projects with civil-society agencies controlled by Russia, and also promotion of favorable image of Russia in the local media. An establishment of a new “Northern Europe” branch of the Center for Strategic Research (RISI) to Helsinki in summer 2013 can be interpreted in this framework. The center is supposed to facilitate discussion on topics that are important for Russian state interests in the Nordic region.²⁵

How much Russia has economic leverage over the ‘gateway countries’?

Since the mid-1990s regional governments in Finland and to some extent in Sweden and Norway have been engaged in promoting business and trade connections with north-west Russian regions under the gateway slogan. This has led to inter-regional competition over scarce economic and political resources within a specific ‘gateway’. However, the basic logic works upon assumption that improvement of infrastructure and services and modernization of border-crossing and other administrative norms facilitates trade and economic growth in general. Development of gateway infrastructure (physical assets and the norms and regulations) is considered to be in the interests of Russian state because the Nordic-Baltic region is also Russia’s gateway to the European and world markets.

A significant share of Russia’s foreign trade routes run through the Baltic Sea. Russia was the world’s second largest oil producer after Saudi-Arabia in 2011 and 70 per cent of Russia’s oil production is exported. Over 30 per cent of this volume is exported through Primorsk port that is located at the Gulf of Finland.²⁶ The opening of

Dimension partnership in public health and social well-being”. In Aalto et. all. op. cit., p. 96.

25. Zatulín, K.F. (2013): “V Pomoch rossiiskomu sootchestvenniku za rubezhom – 2012-2013”. Institut Diaspory I Integratsii (Institut Stran SNG). Moskva.

26. Liuhto, Kari (2012b): “Russia and the Baltic Sea Region”. Presentation at Centrum Balticum, Turku, 21.11.2012.

the Ust-Luga container port in December 2012 will increase the overall volume of cargo traffic in the Baltic Sea, and helps to divert it from the foreign (e.g. Finnish) ports to Russia's domestic ports. The building of the North Stream pipeline further aggravates this situation, making the Baltic Sea a host of possible new types of security threats from large oil spill to tensions over military build-up.²⁷

Russia is keen on controlling those gateways that it considers are vital for its national security, such as ports and 'international transport corridors'. A concrete expression of this interest are investments targeted to re-building and modernization of the port infrastructure and other assets located in the Russian territory. More recently, Russia has announced that it seeks to protect shipping lanes along the Northern Sea Route. This Arctic route is considered a vital part of Russia's national security.²⁸ Since this year, Russia has announced that it will start regular patrols to protect its Arctic coastline. However, it was not until early 2013 when Russia re-established the northern sea route administration that was abolished in early 2000s.

Notwithstanding the fact that Russia has made it clear that it wants to have a major role in the Arctic (an issue that has importance for all the Nordic countries), Russia's economic influence in the Nordic region so far is rather limited. Trade statistics show that there is great variation in the importance of Russia as a trading partner in the Nordic-Baltic region. In 2011 the share of Russia in imports and exports of Denmark was only 2 percent, around the same level as the trade between Russia and Norway. The share of Russia in Sweden's exports is also 2 percent, but in imports 6 per cent. From Nordic countries, Finland is clearly an exception as it is listed among Russia's 15 biggest trading partners. Russia's share of Finland's total imports is 19 per cent and in exports 9 per cent. From the Baltic States, Lithuania has the biggest share of Russian imports, 32 per cent.²⁹ Seen from another angle, the EU's share in Russia's foreign trade turnover in 2011 was 48 per cent. From the Nordic countries, Finland's share was 2.3

percent, Sweden's 1.1 percent, Denmark 0.5 percent and Norway 0.4 percent.³⁰ These figures do not seem to speak in favor of 'growing interdependency' theory, as the gateway approach presupposes.

Investments in the Nordic region that originate from Russia can be regarded as another indication of Russia's presence in the region. Russia's share of foreign direct investments in Norway and Sweden is considered to be marginal. This is also the case with Denmark. In Finland, Russia's share of investments has decreased from 4 percent in 1994 to 1 percent in 2010. Overall there are some 2000 firms with the Russian citizens in the BoD. Most of these firms are very small and the number of inactive firms is considered to be substantial.³¹ Two exceptions to this rule can be noted. First, possible involvement of Russian state company in the building a new atomic power station to Finland, and second, the selling of the remaining stake of the Helsinki Shipyard to United Shipbuilding Corporation (OSK) in autumn 2013. In Finnish public discussion, this development is seen as an example of 'normalization' of relations between Russia and Finland. If we follow the above-mentioned theory introduced by Russian researchers, this may indicate further problems in the political sphere.

It is the energy sphere that can be considered as the main venue for Russia's influence in the Nordic region. A former deputy Minister of Fuel and Energy, A. T. Shatalov, noted during the first international conference on the development of the Arctic offshore in September 1993, that "Russia is prepared to participate in development of the general concept for energy policy in *Greater Europe* aimed at establishment of the integrated 'Energy House', in which citizens of all countries could feel warm, comfortable and safe".³² In Shatalov's vision Russia is a provider of energy security and active participant in re-designing Greater Europe's energy markets. The recent developments seem to indicate quite different scenario. It has become evident that Russia is prepared to use its energy resources as a political tool in the post-Soviet space.³³

27. Kaljurand et.all. (2012).

28. Pynnöniemi, Katri (2008): *New road, new life, new Russia: International transport corridors at the conjunction of geography and politics in Russia*. University of Tampere Press: Tampere; Kramer, Andrew (2013): "Russia preparing patrol of Arctic shipping lanes". *The New York Times*, 14.9.2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/world/europe/russia-preparing-patrols-of-arctic-shipping-lanes.html>.

29. Liuhto, Kari (2012a): "Importance of Russia to Finland and the Baltic Sea Region in 2020", Presentation at Pan-European Institute, 12.9.2012.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Cited in Pynnöniemi, Katri (2000): "The construction of the transport networks in the European North: from vertical to horizontal order of regionalization". In Rytövuori-Apunen, op.cited. p.142. Emphasis added.

33. Both Ukraine and Belarus were exposed to Russian energy pressure in 2006 and 2007 and Ukraine again in 2013. Moldova experienced a full stop in gas supplies in 2006 when it refused to agree to higher price. Godzimirski, Jakub (2008): "Russia's energy strategy and

Recently, the EU has been actively pushing Russian company Gazprom to follow the EU rules.³⁴

Jakub Godzimirski has formulated Europe's main energy challenge with regard to Russia as follows: "how to secure Russian supplies of energy to Europe without making Europe more exposed to Russia's political use of energy resources?"³⁵ Since this general dilemma is difficult to solve, Godzimirski suggests that regional level cooperation, due to already shown political and social interests, may prove a partial way out. He identifies energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy as possible points of cooperation.

The gas consumption in Finland and the Baltic States is totally dependent on Russian gas, whereas Norway, Denmark and Sweden do not import Russian gas at all. Actually, Norway and to some extent Denmark compete with Russia for market shares in energy sector. In terms of oil consumption, both Finland and Sweden are among the 12 top importers of Russian crude oil.³⁶

On the other hand, the development of renewable energy sources has been regarded, for example in Finland and Sweden, as a means to strengthen these countries energy independence.³⁷

Playing the 'status quo' card in the Nordic region?

As was argued in the beginning of this article it is in Russia's interests to maintain the current security constellation in the Nordic region intact. To put it briefly, this means that enlargement of NATO is not on the cards for Sweden and Finland, if Russia were to decide upon it. Few analysts would predict a quick solution to this dilemma. However, what is generally acknowledged is that both countries are more and more NATO capable, a factor that facilitates countries participation in the NATO-led peace support operations.³⁸

An argument made above that Russia prefers

prospects for a Northern Dimension energy partnership". In Aalto, Pami et al., op. cit., p. 150.

34. The latest indication of this was the EU South Stream.

35. Ibid. p. 150.

36. Ibid. p. 146.

37. Godzimirski 2008, 158. See also Aalto, Pami (2007): *The EU-Russia Energy Dialogue: Europe's Future Energy Strategy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

38. Dahl, Ann-Sofie and Pauli Järvenpää (2013): "Sweden, Finland and NATO. Security partners and security providers". In Dahl and Järvenpää (eds.), op. cit., p. 134.

status quo over change needs to be put in perspective. Sergei Karaganov, an influential figure in Russian foreign and security political sphere, summarizes a mainstream approach to changing security environment. According to Karaganov:

*The liberal dreams (about a world government) and reactionary ones (of a new concert of powerful nations that would govern the world) show no signs of ever coming true. The world is sliding to plain chaos exacerbated by growing interdependence.*³⁹

After listing what can be termed as negative attributes of changing security environment, Karaganov identifies three aspects that shape the new era and strive it towards "greater reliance on military strength". First, the use of military power is considered as a means to "close or open access [to territory and its resources]". In the western debate, this is conceptualized as "access to global commons" including access to international maritime routes, space (satellites, navigation, air space), and information resources. Second, "structural changes in international system", according to Karaganov, mean that global governance institutions are weaker and ability of nation states to "control information, financial, economic and political processes in their territories" are becoming "thinner". Against this backdrop, military strength is the "only tool of which the states almost entirely keep in control". Third, Karaganov notes that economic problems at home may push countries to seek relief from "victorious war".⁴⁰

In the National Security Strategy, adopted during Medvedev's presidency in spring 2009, it is noted that "World development is following the path of globalization in all spheres of international life, which in turn is characterized by a high degree of dynamism and interdependence of events [...] As a result of the rise of new centers of economic growth and political influence, a qualitatively new geopolitical situation is unfolding. There is an increasing tendency to seek resolutions to existing problems and regulate crisis situations on a regional basis, without the participation of non-regional powers", the strategy suggests.⁴¹ Thus, if the general security environment is perceived as chaotic (yet comprehensible), Russian strategists have envisioned some ways in which to bring

39. Karaganov, Sergei (2012): "Security Strategy: Why Arms?". *Russia in Global Affairs*, 26.10.2012. <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/print/pubcol/Security-Strategy-Why-Arms-15716>. p. 2.

40. Karaganov (2012), 2.

41. Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020, 12.5.2009; Karaganov (2012).

order into it. This is what an idea of greater Europe is basically about.

A Polish researcher Marek Menkiszak has argued that between 2002 and 2011 concrete outlines were formulated for “Greater Europe” concept as part of Russia’s foreign and security political thinking. In accordance with this concept, a greater Europe would consist of two integrated blocs: “the Western bloc of the European Union, with Germany in the dominant role, and the Eastern bloc, consisting of the emerging Eurasian Union, with Russia in a hegemonic position. By signing agreements and establishing joint institutions, the two blocs would form a partly integrated area of security, economic and energy cooperation, and human contacts”, Menkiszak writes.⁴² The point made by Menkiszak is that this arrangement would not entail diffusion of the European values and standards with those of the ‘Eurasian neighbours’, neither it would limit Russia’s room for maneuver as one of the great powers.

What is clearly missing from the above discussion is perception of security environment in terms of complex security concept. In other words, little attention is generally paid to problems of critical infrastructure protection in the Russian mainstream discourse. Due to the forest fires in 2010, Krymsk catastrophe in 2012 and flooding in the Russian Far East in 2013 this topic is no longer absent from the Russian public debate. Currently, the situation seems to be rather polarized. On the one hand, perceptions of security environment differ quite significantly, whereas, on the other hand, there are examples of local level cooperation aimed to improve security of critical infrastructures.⁴³

Concluding remarks: implications for EU-Russia relations

In the beginning of this article I referred to Pavel Baev’s analysis published in 2003. This year is a good reference point for another reason as well. It was in 2003 that the EU and Russia agreed to establish an EU-Russia strategic partnership based on the notion of four “common spaces”: the Common Economic Space, a Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, a Common

Space of External Security and a Common Space of Research, Education and Culture. Currently, this cooperation framework is considered to be dysfunctional, or as some have argued, a promise of partnership never actually did materialize.

One explanation for this situation, as suggested by Christer Pursiainen, is that without supra-national elements, “integration meets its limits rather soon in its traditional meaning”. However, he also notes that in the “more postmodern meaning of integration, the market driven convergence of legal systems as well as the transnationalization of capital and civil societies may well bring the societies closer to each other in the longer run”. With the emergence of “Eurasian civilization” discourse and its institutionalization in the form of Eurasian economic space, Russia has sought to challenge the dominance of western institutions and ideas. Russia has also made it clear that it would like to establish a formal relationship between the European Union and the future Eurasian Union. To transform the current Customs Union into viable trans-national agency requires political and economic resources that Russia may not, after all, have. Yet, an idea of Eurasian civilization and Russia’s role as a great power can be exploited in advancing Russia’s interests in the regional setting.

So far, the regional level cooperation forums in the Nordic-Baltic region have largely functioned as non-political arenas for EU-Russia interaction. It cannot be excluded that inter-regional cooperation will be re-politicized in one form or another and further marginalized. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which normal day-to-day interaction (in the form of trade and tourism, for example) would not provide have a ‘balancing function’, even if, too much should not be read into it. Yet, the single most important challenge of the Russian ‘presence’ is the divergence rather than convergence of threat perceptions and understanding of what constitutes a change in the security environment in the Nordic region. To change this situation, requires not just for more interaction, but qualitatively different engagement.◇

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