



The Spectre of a Multipolar Europe

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The Illusion of Order and the Rise of Multipolar Europe

Executive Summary

Introduction

The European Union has spent much of the last decade defending a European order that no longer functions while hoping for a global order that will probably never come. As a result, the European continent is less stable than we thought it had become, while the EU is less influential than we hoped it would be. It is true that war between major powers is unlikely, but EU governments know that the existing security institutions were unable to prevent the Kosovo crisis in 1998-9, to slow the arms race in the Caucasus, to prevent cuts to the EU's gas supply in 2008, to prevent the Russo-Georgian war or arrest instability in Kyrgyzstan this year - let alone make headway in resolving the continent's other so-called frozen conflicts.

At the same time, two of Europe's three key security actors are increasingly questioning either the legitimacy of the existing order or their role within it. Russia, which was never comfortable with NATO or EU enlargements, is now powerful enough to openly call for a new European security architecture. Turkey, frustrated by the short-sighted way some EU member states have blocked accession negotiations with the EU, still wants to join the EU but is increasingly pursuing an independent foreign policy and looking for a larger role to accommodate its growing aspirations; unless EU member states show good faith by opening new chapters, this trend will only be strengthened.

These shifts within the European space are taking place in a global context in which Europe as a whole is losing its centrality in international politics. As new sovereignty-minded global centers of power like China challenge Europe's multilateral vision, the United States' interest in Europe is dramatically declining. The perpetuation of this dysfunctional order also means that the EU is squandering the opportunity to use the tools it has at its disposal. In this context, we believe it is in

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the interests of EU member states to respond creatively to President Medvedev's proposal of a new security architecture and develop their own positive conception of a new security order for the European space that institutionalizes the EU as a major security actor.

The multipolar Europe in a multipolar world

In the 1990s, the EU hoped that American hard power would underpin the spread of European soft power and the integration of all the regional powers into a liberal order in which the rule of law, pooled sovereignty and interdependence would gradually replace military conflict, the balance of power and spheres of influence. This European vision for exporting peace and security was based on the idea of sharing values and institutions - what might be called the 'democratic enlargement' paradigm. But the EU's 'unipolar moment' is over. Although Europeans were quick to hail the rise of a multipolar world, they were much slower to spot the parallel emergence of a multipolar Europe, which is increasingly defined by competition between the continent's major powers – the EU, Russia and Turkey – for influence in a contested neighbourhood of states created out of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. As a response to the emergence of a multipolar Europe, many in the EU and the US have begun experimenting with an alternative to the 'democratic enlargement' paradigm that could be called 'interest-based realism'. But this strategy is no more capable of creating a genuine European order than 'democratic enlargement'.

Instead, EU member states need to stop thinking of Europe's history over the last twenty years as the development of a single project centred on the EU and NATO and instead understand it as the story of four parallel identity-building projects, all of which are young, weak and vulnerable in different ways. Three of the projects are the emerging poles of the multipolar Europe: the EU's internal project, which is based on the idea of security through pooled sovereignty, Russia's post-imperial project, which aims to build a state that mobilises the nation to act on its behalf; and Turkey's post-Kemalist project, which aims to create an EU-oriented 'Muslim democracy' with its own independent foreign policy. The fourth project exists in the places in between – in other words, the newly sovereign states on the territory of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia. The dynamics of these four projects have become even more important as the US reverts to its role as an offshore balancer in Europe.

The EU's new security dilemma

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Alongside the US, the EU saw itself as the big winner of the Cold War. But many of the EU's apparent triumphs are now coming back to haunt it: Russia resents its supposed 'humiliation'; the euro is in crisis; and the rising economic powers that have benefited from globalisation are not supporting Europe's global multilateral agenda. The financial crisis has revealed the structural contradictions at the heart of EU's unfinished project: member states' economies need more immigrants than their populations seem ready to tolerate and monetary union needs more political integration than their elites are able to deliver. But while both European publics and European policy elites are disappointed by the EU's performance, they paradoxically see the EU as a key player not only in the economy but more and more also in foreign and security policy.

As part of the research for this report, ECFR conducted a unique survey of the foreign policy elites of all 27 member states, which included more than 250 interviews and a study of the national security documents of the member states. It showed that the EU's foreign policy elites have fundamentally redefined what they mean by security in three ways. First, they increasingly look at security through the eyes of insurance companies rather than military planners – that is, they take peace for granted and think in terms of risks instead of threats. Second, the vacuum left by the absence of war has been filled with post-modern fears – in other words, threats to their standards of living: the impact of the financial crisis, energy insecurity, climate change and immigration. Third, Europeans increasingly fear that they are becoming marginalised as power shifts away from the West – for example, almost all member states are interested in what William Walker has called 'positional security'.

Alongside these shifts in threat perceptions, European countries seem to be rethinking their approach to security. Most surprisingly, they seem to be outgrowing the divisions that have afflicted the EU over the last decade. We expected that the survey would show a wide range of incompatible threat perceptions and confirm the structural divisions among EU member states on their relations with great powers such as Russia or the US. Instead, however, the survey found a surprising degree of unity about threat perceptions. There is a new unity about how to deal with Russia as 'old Europeans' have lost faith in the 'transformative power' of integration and 'new Europeans' have become more sceptical about the prospects of containing Russia. Although many among EU elites still support EU and NATO enlargement, they have lost faith in its ability to act as the main institutional framework for European security. There is also now agreement among Europeans about the need to give the EU a greater role in guaranteeing European security.

The discreet charm of Russia's revisionism

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The 'Russian question' has been the one of the most challenging conundrums for architects of European order over the last three centuries, but the peculiar combination of strengths and weaknesses in today's Russia make it even more complex than the Soviet Union was before 1991. Since NATO's military intervention in Kosovo in 1999, Russia has become an increasingly revisionist power. However, although the Kremlin still sees NATO's enlargement in the post-Soviet space as the major threat to Russia's security, its foreign policy elite has a very different view of threats and of the European order that it did just a few years ago. In particular, the Russian elite's fear of economic backwardness has led to a re-think of Russian strategy: according to a leaked memo, President Medvedev's political allies insist that building alliances in order to modernise the economy should be the major objective of Russia's foreign policy today. Russian foreign policy therefore aims above all to create a hard-shelled state that will be integrated into the global economy but protected from external political influence.

Out of this re-think has emerged a new *Westpolitik* that is centred on four objectives: to assert Russia's European identity; to make economic development the major objective of Russia's foreign policy; to develop strategic cooperation with the US while keeping intense contacts with the new centres of global influence such as China, India and Brazil; and to accept the reality of the EU while focusing on strategic cooperation with some key European states – above all Germany. President Medvedev's proposal therefore reflects a genuine change in the way Russia defines its foreign policy interests and its need for the EU's help. In particular, Russia wants to agree a new security treaty sooner rather than later, because many in the Russian elite realise that Russia's recent resurgence could simply represent the temporary rise of a declining power. Although this new approach is based on foundations that are still quite fragile, it creates a real opening for more co-operative relationship.

Russia is likely to continue to compete with the EU in its neighbourhood. Russian elites will do their best to resist the West's policies of transformation or containment, they view control over the export routes of gas and oil coming from the post-Soviet space as a pre-condition for Russia's global role and they want to create favourable conditions in the post-Soviet space for the development of Russian business, which is currently uncompetitive. But Russian elites are also very aware of the danger of 'imperial overstretch' and Russia's neighbourhood policy is not simply, as some assume, trying to turn the clock back to the Soviet era. Given its strategic objectives in its neighbourhood, Russia also places huge importance in developing a strategic partnership with Turkey and is therefore encouraging the rise of Turkey as an independent centre of power and an energy hub.

Turkey: an actor, not an issue

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Once on the periphery of the West, Turkey has gradually emerged as the centre of its own world, which encompasses the Middle East, the Caucasus and the Balkans and even areas further afield such as the Gulf and North Africa. As Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu put it, “Turkey is an actor, not an issue”. For much of the post-1989 period, Turkey’s main foreign policy objective was integration into the EU, but as its population and economy has grown and as major EU member states have become less enthusiastic about enlargement, Turkey is increasingly trading its place as a second-class member of the Western club for a quest to become a regional power with a global voice.

Although Ankara is committed to EU accession and remains a staunch NATO ally, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP have crafted a new ambitious foreign policy based on Davutoğlu’s version of the idea of ‘strategic depth’. Turkey now aims to deepen its political and economic links with countries and regions lying across its borders in order to obtain a stronger voice in global affairs. On occasion, Turkey has even been prepared to confront the US and its NATO allies. As public opinion in Turkey shifts, its relationship with the EU has also changed. Accession to the EU remains a priority but is certainly not *the* priority for the AKP as it was in 2002-5.

Turkey now also has its own neighbourhood policy (TNP), which is driven not by the AKP’s Islamic roots and sense of solidarity with Middle Eastern neighbours but by pragmatic calculations. Today Turkey deploys economic and soft power resources as well as hard power, above all in the Middle Eastern neighbours but also in South East Europe and the Caucasus. Thanks to its neighbourhood policy, Turkey is now becoming, alongside the EU and Russia, a pole in the emerging multipolar Europe. Turkey also has a new relationship with Russia that is based on converging economic and strategic interests. Turkey’s post-Kemalist foreign policy, its neighbourhood policy and its role in the emerging multipolar Europe are the product of systemic power shifts in Europe and the Middle East. Europe’s security architecture should recognise and respond effectively to this new reality. Giving Turkey by a top-table seat in a new European security dispensation would help the EU to harness Turkish soft and hard power in its neighbourhood.

Post-European America

The latest chapter in America’s involvement in European security was epitomised by a non-event: President Obama’s decision to skip the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall because, as his spokesperson explained, he quite simply had other more important places to be. His absence from the celebration was a powerful metaphor for the shift of the US to a role of off-shore balancer in Europe. The US security guarantee to its European allies remains firmly in place, but its importance has progressively diminished. This disengagement from Europe’s internal

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security issues reflects structural changes in the world that have reduced Europe's centrality to American strategy and is likely to continue even if there is a change in administration. The US, which for half a century was the single most important security factor on the continent of Europe, will continue to provide a guarantee against the recurrence of major war in Europe, but increasingly expects Europe to address other security threats on its own.

As the US withdraws from Europe, American attitudes to Russia and Turkey have also been changing. Although the US shares many of Europe's concerns about the return of spheres of influence in Europe, and some senior figures in Washington retain a particular interest in the situation in Georgia or Ukraine, these have clearly not been priorities for the White House or State Department in their contacts with Moscow. Even where 'near-abroad' issues have arisen – such as the situation in Kyrgyzstan – the focus of the Obama administration has been on their impact on global issues. If the US's relationship with Russia has been 'reset', its relations with Turkey have crashed. When Davutoğlu went to Washington in June 2010, his team were refused entry to the White House by security officials and their meeting with US officials had to take place in a nearby hotel. This episode illustrates the growing mistrust between the two countries.

With the EU member states disappointing, the Turks frustrating and the Russians more important as partners than as opponents, Americans now struggle to interest themselves much in NATO. There has been no serious US effort at senior levels to engage Europeans in real discussion about shared goals, or how the organisation might be refitted for purpose after the damage it has sustained in Afghanistan. Beyond a redesigned, regional missile defence, the US seems to have given up much ambition for NATO. But though America's shift to offshore balancing has alarmed many Europeans, it could paradoxically help them to develop a legitimate European order in which the US is present.

The order that could be

As political attention flows from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Europe risks being transformed from a centre of geopolitics into a periphery. In these circumstances, it is in the interests of all three of Europe's major powers to find order amongst themselves so that they have a solid foundation from which to engage with the rest of the world. But the new European order cannot simply be a return to a 'concert of powers' in which the EU, Russia and Turkey draw territorial or functional red lines around the states in their respective neighbourhoods in an attempt to avoid conflict between major powers. The challenge facing Europe today is to show how the continent's new, vulnerable and mutually dependent state-building projects can live together in harmony. The management of interdependence should replace the balance of power as the soul of the new European order.

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Instead of an anachronistic ‘concert of powers’, the EU should aim to develop a ‘concert of projects’ – a way of breathing life into multilateral arrangements for discussing and managing the continent’s security in the interests of all. Rather than trying to transform all the nations of Europe into EU member states or re-establishing a balance of power, the new European order should be designed to help Europe’s state-building projects live together in peace. This means enhancing the effectiveness of the EU, consolidating Russia’s post-imperial identity in its current borders, encouraging Turkey’s ambition to be a regional power with global impact but integrating Ankara’s activity in a common framework, and stimulating the integration of the Western Balkans in the EU and helping to build functioning states on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

To make this happen, the EU should go beyond its policy of defensive engagement with President Medvedev’s proposal through the OSCE. The EU should be open to the creation of new treaties and institutions, but should stress that such treaties should be signed and such institutions built from the bottom up rather than the top down. We believe that the best way for the EU to achieve these goals is through initiating an informal security triad between the EU, Turkey and Russia. It should be based on three elements:

- A European security triad. Rather than setting up a new institution, the EU should call for the creation of a regular informal European security triad that would build on the Merkel-Medvedev idea of an EU-Russia security dialogue but expand it to include Turkey. The triad – which would bring together Europe’s major security powers in the same way that the G20 convenes the world’s economic ones – could meet regularly to discuss the major security issues in our continent and the overlapping neighbourhoods of its central players.
- A European security action plan. The first task of the triad should be to elaborate an action plan for reducing tensions on the European continent. This could include a number of goals, including reducing the threat of destabilization of Europe’s periphery by de-militarization of the most volatile regions and solving frozen conflicts that remain the major source of insecurity. The solution of these frozen conflicts should be made a pre-condition for signing any new treaty.
- A European security treaty. EU leaders are right to be suspicious about the benefits of negotiating a treaty before Russia has shown itself willing to make progress on the many pressing security challenges on the European continent. However, EU member states would also have much to gain from a new treaty – if, that is, it comes at the end of a process of confidence-building. If the EU were a signatory to such a treaty, it would be institutionalised as a key security actor in Europe and enabled to use the range of tools it has at its disposal to deal with the threats its member states face.

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The approach to European security we propose would be good for the EU because it would recognise its role as a central anchor for security on the European continent, thus providing a powerful impetus for a genuine strategic debate among member states about what kind of order the EU should be promoting. By institutionalising the EU's role in the European security trialogue, EU member states could end the anomaly that the EU – a major supplier of European security - is not represented in any of our continent's security institutions. This is both a natural move towards implementing the Lisbon Treaty and a response to a shift in EU security preoccupations. The EU is best placed to deal with the threats on which EU security elites increasingly focus, as the survey carried out for this research shows.

Russia, meanwhile, would see the EU's engagement with the new security architecture as recognition of its relevance as a European power at a moment that the European continent as a whole risks being marginalised. The trialogue would also recognise Turkey's role as a rising power and begin to provide an anchor for its foreign policy activism at a very risky moment when Turkey is losing confidence in the sincerity of the accession process. Accession negotiations with Turkey would continue to take place alongside the trialogue and it would make sense to use its establishment as an occasion to open chapters on energy security and CSDP. When Turkey becomes a member of the EU, the trialogue would simply become a dialogue between the EU and Russia. This trilateral approach could also be attractive for the newly independent states in Europe's periphery because it would create new mechanisms for addressing some of the existential challenges that they face, such as frozen conflicts and energy disputes.

The dilemma facing the European Union in its own continent is somewhat similar to that faced by the US at a global level. The EU can do little to prevent Europe's evolution from a unipolar to a multipolar order; but it can do a lot to shape the relations between its emerging poles. The new approach would take advantage of a political opening created by Moscow's desire to modernise and Turkey's search for a regional role, and recast the continent's institutional order for a world in which Europe is increasingly peripheral and in which a weak neighbour can be as frightening as a strong one. It would be the first step towards creating a trilateral rather than a tripolar Europe: a new institutional order in the continent that (to paraphrase Lord Ismay) keeps the EU united, Russia post-imperial and Turkey European.

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