Medvedev's alternative European security architecture

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Within a month after becoming President, Dmitry Medvedev took the initiative of pleading for a new European security architecture, replacing the existing one which, allegedly, had proved to be unable to deal with the security challenges after the end of the Cold War. Subsequently, his initial statement became a consistent topic of Medvedev's external security policy.

Launch of the proposal in Berlin

In a speech in Berlin on 5 June 2008, Medvedev assessed that Europe's security architecture still bore the stamp of an ideology inherited from the past.[2] Consequently, he called on European countries to start working out an all-European security pact. As to the OSCE, the Russian President hinted that this organization could embody European civilization's newfound unity, but that it was prevented from becoming a full-fledged general regional organization. Not just because of the organization's own incomplete institutional development but also by obstruction by other groups that intended to continue the old line of bloc politics.

He furthermore explained that existing organizations in the Euro-Atlantic space could also become signatory parties to the pact, though not to the would-be pan-European organization. Not only the OSCE, but according to Medvedev, NATO had also disqualified itself as the true European security actor, trying to find the purpose of its existence by globalizing its missions, to the detriment of the UN's prerogatives, and by bringing in new members. Furthermore, he rejected the transatlantic basis of the alliance. Although he mentioned North America as one of the three branches — together with Russia and the EU — of European civilization, he continued that Atlanticism was a single basis for security which had exhausted itself and that the concept of a single Euro-Atlantic space from Vancouver to Vladivostok in stead should be the centre of European security policy. In his speech the Russian president also referred to the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 as the legal foundation for the European security system, which had withstood the test of time despite all the difficulties encountered. This document he regarded as the basis for the next step, namely, by drafting and signing a legally binding treaty on European security. Thus, according to Medvedev, a regional pact should be formed, based on the principles of the UN Charter. This pact could achieve a comprehensive resolution of the security indivisibility and arms control issues in

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[2] Speech at Meeting with German Political, Parliamentary and Civic Leaders, 5 June 2008. This source and all subsequent sources can be found at: http://eng.kremlin.ru.

Europe. To establish such a treaty the Russian leader proposed a general European summit to start the process of drafting this agreement. All European countries were to take part in this summit, but as individual countries, leaving aside any allegiances to blocs or other groups. He continued that national interests stripped bare of any distorting ideological motivations should be the starting point for all taking part.

Further appeals at forums at home and abroad
In his Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) of 12 July 2008, Medvedev repeated his proposal of June 2008. At the introduction of the FPC, Medvedev reiterated his call for a new collective security system in Europe, specifically referring to the Helsinki Accords and (arms control) treaties between the Soviet Union and NATO, as the legacy to start from.[3] On 28 July Russia's ambassador to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, clarified Moscow's ideas on a new European security architecture in a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in Brussels. Rogozin rejected European and American reactions to Medvedev's proposal that this was aimed at weakening NATO, OSCE and other Western security institutions. After the Georgian conflict the proposal for a new European security architecture came on the agenda of a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), in Moscow on 4 September. At that event Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, stated that the CSTO had agreed to 'organize joint work' on creating a European security treaty. Next, at an international forum in Evian, France, from 6-8 October, Medvedev declared that the USA had forfeited its place at the heart of the world order and called on Europe to work with Russia on a new security pact.[4] Subsequently, at the regular EU-Russia summit, in Nice on 14 November, the Russian president received support from his French counterpart, Sarkozy, who concurred in holding talks on a new security architecture for Europe. Next, Sergey Lavrov discussed the proposal at a meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Helsinki, on 5 December 2008. However, at the OSCE meeting there was not a majority of the member states willing to accept the proposal of Sarkozy to convene a special summit on this topic in mid-2009. On 20 April 2009 at the Helsinki University Medvedev once more addressed the issue in particular by disapproving Western security policy.[5] A new item was calling his proposal for a new architecture 'Helsinki Plus'. By referring to cornerstones of European security, such as the original Helsinki Agreements of 1975, as well as (again) the principle 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok' Medvedev tried to find historical credits for his ideas.

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[3]   Speech at the Meeting with Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to International Organisations, 15 July 2008.

[4]   Speech at World Policy Conference, Evian France, 8 October 2008.

[5]   Speech at Helsinki University and answers to questions from audience, 20 April 2009.

A draft European security treaty
After one and a half year of statements on 29 November 2009 Russian President Dmitry Medvedev finally published a corresponding document, a draft of a so-called treaty on European security.[6] The draft emphasizes a desire to create a common and undivided security space in the Euro-Atlantic region in order to delete the vestiges of the Cold War. The treaty is said to formalize in international law the principle of indivisible security as a legal obligation pursuant to which no nation or international organization operating in the Euro-Atlantic region is entitled to strengthen its own security at the cost of other nations or organisations. When such a threat to security occurs the treaty provides mechanisms of consultations and conferences to counter this. The conferences take unanimous and binding decisions, which therefore must be carried out by the signatory states. Furthermore, the treaty also allows the possibility for the signatories to give military assistance if another signatory state is attacked.

The development towards this draft of a European security treaty demonstrates a unilateral action of Moscow, probably to underline its return as a Great Power. Common procedure for security cooperation documents dictates that states convene and jointly establish a draft treaty. However, Medvedev first unilaterally launched a proposal and subsequently a draft text for a treaty. Whereas the Kremlin frequently has opposed unilaterally and dominant actions (of the USA), with regard to the European security architecture Moscow has followed a similar approach. The emphasis on legally binding decisions by the signatories' conference of the proposed treaty would make any independent Western actions in the realm of security virtually impossible. Medvedev emphasises in the draft treaty that military action must be subordinated to decisions of the UN Security Council (UNSC). As a permanent member of this body Russia has a veto right which allows it to prevent any (Western) initiative to military action. The civil war in Bosnia in the 1990s, the oppression of the Albanese in Kosovo around 1999 and the rejection of UNSC resolutions by Saddam Hussein in Iraq up to 2003 have demonstrated that the UN is often a lame duck because the Great Powers with their veto rights determine developments in stead of international law, as laid down in the UN Charter. As a result of this, (Western) military action outside the UN in some cases is inevitable for stabilizing or restoring international law and order. However, with this treaty Moscow seems eager to prevent any such action without Russia's approval. Another essential point is that the Kremlin with its proposals for a new European security architecture claims to enhance regional security cooperation. However, in recent years Russia's conduct has proven the opposite. In August 2008 Moscow has carried out military operations all over Georgia, without a mandate of the UNSC. And this summer Russia forced the end of the observer missions of UN and OSCE in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and continuous to refuse the EU observer mission access to these separatist regions. Such

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[6]   The draft of the European Security Treaty has been published; European Security Treaty, 29 November 2009.

unilateral behaviour and blocking of international institutions does not promote Moscow's reliability as partner for increased security cooperation in Europe.

Medvedev's alternative challenging Western interests
Overall, although rightly assessing shortcomings in the current European security architecture, Medvedev's proposal especially contains a negative attitude, i.e. what should not be done in stead of what could be done to improve the existing security mechanisms. Also, the proposal is limited in only discussing hard or military security and hence excluding other dimensions of security as for instance the OSCE deals with. It is obvious that Medvedev's security treaty can prevent necessary military action by Western actors. Additionally, this document leaves NATO, OSCE and EU out because these Western-oriented organizations cannot take part in the decision-making process of the conference of this treaty. Furthermore, in his pleas for a new European security architecture the Russian president has repeatedly stated that 'Atlanticism' — US-European security cooperation — is a remainder of the Cold War which has lost its value and reason for existence. Consequently, the Americans would be kept outside of the European door. So far Medvedev with his proposal has gained one point of success: division in Europe. For his alternative European security architecture the Russian leader has received support from a number of countries with which Moscow maintains good political and/or economic (energy) cooperation, such as France, Germany and Italy. Paris, for instance, is eager to sell sophisticated amphibious aircraft carriers to Moscow, without bothering about EU and OSCE arms export regulations. On the opposite site of that bloc we find the Baltic States, Poland and Czech Republic, which, because of their historical experiences with Russia, stand very suspicious towards initiatives of the Kremlin on security policy. Security cooperation with Russia should be encouraged but not if this obstructs Western security policy and promotes discord in Europe. The OSCE already provides security cooperation for all states between Vancouver and Vladivostok. However, Moscow does not consider the OSCE a useful instrument for the objectives of its security policy. Medvedev's draft treaty clearly damages Western interests and should therefore be rejected.