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A New Start for Russian-EU Security Policy?

*The Weimar Triangle, Russia and the
EU's Eastern Neighbourhood*

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The project *Weimar Triangle Network – European Experts’ Discussions* was launched as a common initiative by the Genshagen Foundation, the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation and the German-Polish magazine “Dialog” in 2008. At the annual conferences a pool of Polish, German and French young leaders with a European focus in the fields of administration, politics, economy and sciences discuss controversial questions regarding European politics. Germany, Poland and France alternate in hosting the conferences.

The *Weimar Triangle Network* follows three objectives: the promotion of the dialogue between German, French and Polish young leaders about the main challenges of the European Union, the development of a mutual understanding of the national positions regarding European issues and the strengthening of the relations between the civil societies of the Weimar Triangle.

In 2008 and 2009, the first conferences covered issues pertaining to the European Neighbourhood Policy in the South and the East and the European Energy and Climate Policy as both an internal and external challenge.

This publication is related to the 2010 conference, which focused on the future of security cooperation between the EU, the United States and Russia. It is the second study based on the results of the Project *Weimar Triangle Network*.



Summary

The improvement in security policy cooperation between Russia and the USA since 2009, together with the extensive withdrawal of the USA from the post-Soviet region, has led to an intensification in the security policy dialogue between Russia and the EU. As a consequence, the conflicts in the post-Soviet states have shifted into the focus of attention. In particular, it is the states of the Weimar Triangle, Germany, France and Poland, that are pursuing a security policy dialogue with Russia. At present, Moscow appears willing to make concessions in this area. Following a German-Russian summit meeting in Meseberg in 2010, the conflict over Transnistria has been declared a test case for the ability of Russia and the EU to resolve conflicts. At a trilateral summit between Germany, France and Russia in the autumn of the same year, a French proposal for the intensification of the security dialogue with Russia was explored. Within the framework of the Weimar Triangle there have also been an increasing number of meetings at the Foreign Minister and State Secretary level to discuss the issue of relations with the Eastern neighbourhood.

The improvement in the climate of relations between the EU and Russia is currently based on a set of mutual interests covering international policy issues (Afghanistan, Iran) shared by both Russia and the “West”. At the same time, Russia’s willingness to cooperate has grown as a result of the negative effects of the global financial crisis and the recognition that economic modernization can only be achieved with the help of the EU. Nevertheless, there has not been a fundamental shift in Russian foreign policy and the contradictions between Russia and the EU in respect of the post-Soviet states will continue to grow in the medium term. While the necessity for intervention in the Eastern neighbourhood has increased for Brussels as a result of its eastern expansion and the Russian-Georgian war, from a Russian perspective, a continuation of the conflict in the common neighbourhood tends to be to its advantage.

As Moscow increasingly sees the EU as a rival in this region, a solution to the post-Soviet conflicts is considered disadvantageous. Above all, the fear in Russia is that such a development would accelerate the integration of these states into the EU.

While there currently is an overlap of interests between Russia and the “West” in respect of Afghanistan and Iran, this cannot be transferred to relations to the post-Soviet states. With its proposal for a new security treaty for Europe and participation in the Meseberg Memorandum, Russia is looking to exert stronger influence on security policy decisions in Europe. In contrast, Germany and other EU member states are primarily interested in finding a compromise with Russia in order to bring about a solution to the post-Soviet conflicts. Within the EU, Germany and Poland are currently the central states pursuing the formulation of Ostpolitik. The Weimar Triangle can make an important contribution to the profile of the EU’s Ostpolitik, trust building, and a rapprochement between German and Polish positions (in consultation with France) on relations with Russia and other post-Soviet states.



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Bilateralism continues to shape the character of relations between the EU member states and Russia. Germany, France and Italy have traditionally been considered the EU states who, in the first instance, have cultivated bilateral relations with Russia, and only then integrated their policy into the EU framework. Younger EU member states in eastern central Europe such as Poland have criticized this policy up to now. However, ultimately, it has been shown that the EU member states have no interest in an overly independent role for Brussels institutions in respect of foreign policy. For the foreseeable future, even those foreign policy institutions established as a result of the Lisbon treaty, such as the European External Action Service, will not change this fundamentally.¹ For this reason, if EU policy is to be successful in its neighbourhood, a coalition of member states with interests in this region is necessary. They will be required to develop sustainable policies in respect of the neighbourhood, through cooperation with other member states, and need to pursue their concepts over a long time period. In respect of the Eastern neighbourhood, there are currently two concepts which have been placed on the EU agenda by member states. On the one hand, the modernization partnership with Russia, originally a German concept, which, through economic cooperation with Russia, is also intended to promote political reforms. On the other hand, the Eastern Partnership, which is focused on deepening relations with the EU's Eastern neighbourhood states, with the exception of Russia. This was originally

a Polish concept, which together with Sweden, was brought into the EU in 2008.

Within the framework of the three states of the Weimar Triangle, Germany, France and Poland, there has been increased activity in respect of Russia and the Eastern neighbourhood over approximately the last two years. Bilateral and trilateral meetings, including the participation of Russia, have shaped the agenda. This development has proceeded against the background of the new beginning to US and Russian relations initiated under President Obama in 2009. The most visible result of this 'reset' is the ratification of the 'New Start Treaty'² and the exchange of ratification certificates at the Munich Security Conference in February 2011. This has also been accompanied by an improvement in the climate of EU-Russian relations. This development is underlined by Russia's efforts to attract European investment and establish common initiatives for a security policy dialogue and conflict resolution in the post-Soviet region. There has been a growing interest in conflict resolution in the post-Soviet neighbourhood on the part of the EU and its member states, in particular following the Russian-Georgian war, but also within the framework of eastern expansion.

Against this background this paper aims to answer the following questions: Which new approaches exist for an improvement in the security policy dialogue between the EU and Russia? To what extent is an actual improvement in security policy cooperation

with Russia possible in the foreseeable future, in particular, with respect to the conflicts in the post-Soviet region?

► ***I. The increasing importance of the post-Soviet region for the EU member states***

In the past, security policy questions played a limited role in EU-Russian relations, as, on the one side, economic and energy policy interests dominated relations, and on the other, the EU did only have a limited security policy remit. With the eastern expansion in 2004 and 2007, the EU shifted closer to the post-Soviet states and thus the conflict zones emerging from the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union. The ethnic or territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova became increasingly important for EU-Russian relations. Up to that point the EU had only participated in negotiation formats for resolving the post-Soviet conflicts through its member states, however, this changed with the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. Under the French EU Council Presidency a ceasefire agreement was negotiated and an EU Monitoring Mission stationed at the border to the two breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

With a view to an expanded security concept, areas such as energy security, combating the trade of drugs, cross-border criminality and terrorism, as well as the follow-up on conflict resolution, have increased in

importance for EU-Russian relations. Although the discussion of these themes was originally intended to take place within the framework of the EU's 'four common spaces' (in particular the spaces of freedom, security, justice and external security) agreed at the St Petersburg EU-Russia summit in May 2003, the 'four common spaces' have proven to be of little relevance to EU-Russian relations in the areas of foreign and security policy.³ Above all, it is bilateral and trilateral formats that are playing an increasing role in the relations between EU member states and Russia on security issues. Since 2009 an increasing number of meetings in various formats have taken place between Germany, France, Poland and Russia on the theme of security policy and relations with the Eastern neighbourhood.

With these activities, the EU member states are attempting to fill a gap left by the USA's limitation on its activities in the post-Soviet states and European security policy under President Obama.⁴ These developments could lead to bilateral agreements with Russia, without the involvement of the USA or NATO. In contrast to the USA, security risks such as drugs trade, transnational criminality, interruptions in gas supplies, and ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet states, have a direct effect on EU member states due to their geographical proximity. Consequently, European interests in this region differ from those of the USA, which, especially in the era of George W. Bush junior, was focused on pushing back Russian influence in its neighbourhood. In this context, German

policy makers are attempting to integrate their bilateral relations with Russia into the European framework and involve Russia in EU and NATO decision making processes. The goal is to integrate Russia into European security policy and economic institutions by means of trust building, networks and communication instruments, and thus bring about change in relations to and within Russia.

▶ *II. Bilateral and trilateral forums with Russia*

The central point of departure for an intensification of the security policy dialogue between the EU and Russia was established at the meeting between Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on 4th and 5th of June 2010 in Meseberg in the Federal State of Brandenburg, Germany. At this meeting it was agreed to establish a European-Russian political and security policy committee at ministerial level under the chairmanship of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton, and the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov. This committee was designed to establish 'fundamental rules for common civil and military crisis management operations' and to develop proposals 'for the solution of various conflict and crisis situations, to which the EU and Russia can jointly contribute within the framework of suitable

multilateral forums'.⁵ According to this definition, a coordination mechanism was to be established between the EU and Russia, extending beyond that with the USA and NATO. At the same time, an agreement was reached in Meseberg to turn the Transnistrian conflict, supposedly the simplest conflict in the post-Soviet region, into a test case for cooperation between the EU and Russia and their ability to resolve conflicts.

This German initiative was not agreed in advance with the European partners, which led to criticism from the ranks of other EU member states. In light of the fact that the Meseberg meeting took place a few days after the EU-Russia summit (31/05 – 1/06/2010) in the Russian city of Rostov-on Don, it appears incredible that these important EU related security policy themes were first discussed at the bilateral meeting between Angela Merkel and Dmitry Medvedev. At the EU-Russia summit, the Russian side was unable to push through its central demand for a road map for the lifting of visa restrictions. Thus the German attempt to reach a breakthrough in conflict resolution in the post-Soviet region through intensified security cooperation with Russia at the EU level came at a point in time when Russia was expressing its willingness to cooperate in negotiations on visa questions and economic cooperation, but was simultaneously confronted by a lack of interest and will at the EU level. Ultimately, the disconnect between these two meetings underlines the lack of coordination

between the Commission in Brussels and the initiatives of EU member states.

This meeting was followed by a summit meeting between Angela Merkel, Dmitry Medvedev and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Deauville on 18th and 19th of October 2010. At the first high-level trilateral meeting in this constellation since 2006, the intensification of cooperation between the EU and Russia in the areas of the economy as well as foreign and security policy was discussed. Although no concrete and substantive results were achieved, common steps on the key questions of the modernization partnership, the lifting of visa restrictions as well as foreign and security policy were announced. Overall, the three heads of state called for an intensification of security cooperation between Russia and the EU as well as Russia and NATO, which could have a positive effect on the Transnistrian conflict mentioned in the Meseberg Memorandum.⁶

At this meeting, the French president raised the proposal for the creation of a common space for security and economic cooperation between the EU and Russia.⁷ Details of this proposal have not been published by the French side. It can be interpreted as an attempt on the part of the French leadership to intensify economic and security policy cooperation with Russia as a counterweight to Germany and the security dialogue it initiated with Russia in Meseberg.⁸ Since President Sarkozy took office in 2007, France has made special efforts to extend economic and political relations with Russia. As no

concrete publications on this concept have appeared up to now, and no agreement with the other EU member states exists on this issue, it is doubtful whether this proposal can be afforded any more weight than the host of other such proposals made within the context of European-Russian summit diplomacy.

This was preceded by a series of meetings between representatives of the Weimar Triangle at the European Minister level on 1 /02/2010, between Foreign Ministers and the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Gryshchenko on 26-27/04/2010, and again between the three Foreign Ministers with the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the 23/06/2010.⁹ The preliminary high point of this summit diplomacy was the meeting of the Polish and French presidents with the German Federal Chancellor in February 2011 in Warsaw, during which the Polish President, Bronislaw Komorowski, proposed inviting the Russian President Medvedev to one of the subsequent meeting of the Weimar Triangle.¹⁰ During the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Weimar Triangle in June 2010, the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov proposed expanding the triangle to form a quadrangle with the inclusion of Russia.¹¹ Since the reactivation of the Weimar Triangle in 2009, Ostpolitik and policy towards Russia have played an increasing role at summit meetings. Thus, following a meeting with the Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat in May 2010, the German Federal Chancellor subsequently consulted with the French and Polish leadership.

▶ *III. The interests of the Weimar Triangle regarding Russia and the EU's future Ostpolitik*

The increase in activity between the states of the Weimar Triangle and Russia, is derived, in particular, from the improvement of relations between Poland and Russia. Since Donald Tusk took office as Prime Minister in 2007, the Polish government has attempted to improve relations with Russia by means of pragmatic steps. This includes the establishment of a bilateral working group for addressing difficult questions, regular meetings of parliamentarians from both countries, and the founding of a forum for the regions to discuss at regional and local level.¹² In addition to the intensification of the political and social dialogue efforts are directed at improvement in economic relations. In a treaty between the Russian Gazprom and the Polish gas and oil company PGNiG, an increase in the volume of gas supplied by Russia and an extension to the duration of the contract was agreed, despite criticism from the EU Commission.¹³ The Russians' sensitive and compassionate reaction to the plane crash in Smolensk in April 2010, in which President Lech Kaczynski and 95 members of Poland's elite died, gave a further impulse to this politics of rapprochement, at least in the short term.

Within the EU, Poland aspires to a central role in the formulation of policy towards Russia and the other eastern neighbors. Consequently, Germany is seen as an important partner in Warsaw. The goal of the Polish government is to provide a counterweight to the dominance of Russian relations within European Ostpolitik through greater emphasis on the other post-Soviet states. While Germany, France and Italy stand for a European policy focused on Russia, it is Poland in particular, together with the other eastern accession states, which want to give more weight to relations with the other post-Soviet states. In addition to the growing economic and political exchange with Russia, it was Poland (together with Sweden) that brought the concept of the Eastern Partnership (EP) into the EU in 2008.¹⁴ This initiative, for the improvement of the EU's Eastern neighbourhood policy at the multilateral and bilateral level, is to be the central component of Poland's EU presidency in the second half of 2011. In order to further develop the EP and strengthen cooperation with Russia through projects within the framework of this multilateral platform, the Polish government needs partners within the EU.

Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski has pursued closer contacts with his German colleague, Guido Westerwelle, in order to confer greater authority on initiatives directed at the Eastern neighbourhood states. As a consequence, the two foreign ministers met several weeks before the presidential elections in Belarus in Minsk in order to

caution President Alexander Lukashenko on the necessity for fair elections.¹⁵ During the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Warsaw in the beginning of October 2010, questions of European security, the lifting of visa restrictions and energy relations were discussed. From Warsaw's perspective, cooperation with Germany within the framework of the Weimar Triangle, as well as with France, could form a platform lending greater weight to this new policy towards Russia and the Eastern neighbors. As a result, there is a Polish-Russian initiative for an improvement in the small border traffic with the region of Kaliningrad, which is also supported by the German Federal Government.¹⁶

Under President Sarkozy, France has made efforts to further intensify the economic exchange with Russia. Major agreements have been signed, especially in the areas of energy and armaments industry, which have received political support from the government in Paris. The most controversial of these was the agreement between the two countries on the sale of Mistral helicopters to the Russian army in 2010. This decision has come in for special criticism from Georgia, the Baltic States and the USA, as it would result in a strengthening of Russia's military presence in the Baltic and Black Seas. While the Russian government was primarily interested in a technological transfer, the French president justified the signing of the contract with the argument that it will preserve jobs.¹⁷

However, after more than a year of negotiations the contract could not be concluded due to differences on its concrete form.

In the energy sector there are a number of flagship projects such as GDF Suez's investment in the Baltic pipeline with a nine percent stake, and the EDF's stake in the Italian-Russian South Stream project planned for 2011, which will bring gas to Europe through the Caspian Sea. France's President, Nicolas Sarkozy, has put his personal weight behind the expansion of economic relations with Russia and can demonstrate a number of successes, without France having dramatically improved its position as a trading partner with Russia. Here it appears that it is catching up with Germany, the most important of Russia's European trading partners, which constitutes one of the French leadership's central goals. In the process, the 'strategic partnership' between Russia and France also serves to increase the prestige of the two leaderships.¹⁸

The improvement in the political climate and the willingness of the Russian leadership to cooperate in certain foreign policy areas and on economic matters has raised the hope, especially in Berlin, that progress with Russia can also be achieved in the area of security policy, with a view to the conflicts in the post-Soviet states. President Medvedev's moderate tone and his declarations of intent in respect of progress on questions of disarmament and conflict resolution have also raised the hopes of German Chancellor Angela Merkel that she has found a partner for a security policy

dialogue and the modernization of Russia. However, the question remains open as to whether the Russian leadership's rhetoric of cooperation can actually be realized in the form of visible pragmatic steps. Can the common interests in relation to combating drugs in Afghanistan or economic modernization in Russia lead to common policies in the solution of the conflicts in the post-Soviet states?

► *IV. The Russian-Georgian war as starting point for a new security dialogue with the EU*

The Russian-Georgian war in the summer of 2008 showed the importance of new institutions and instruments for the dialogue in security policy with Russia.¹⁹ Russia has not been integrated into the security institutions in the period following the Cold War and the communication mechanisms with Moscow in the areas of security and conflict resolution are only rudimentary developed. The NATO-Russia Council was suspended following the Russian counteroffensive in response to Georgia's attack on South Ossetia, the United Nations was blocked due to Russia's status as a member of the Security Council, and the USA was rendered incapable of action due to a polarizing presidential election campaign. To this day, the OSCE, as an institution with the potential to take on a central role in the post-Soviet region during crisis situations,

is mired in a deep identity crisis and is incapable of mediating in such a conflict. Due to the heterogeneity of its members, differing interests in respect of the future role of the institution and the unanimity principle as applied to all decisions, necessary reforms for raising the status of the OSCE have not been implemented to this day. The OSCE summit in Astana on 2nd December 2010 has shown once again that there is no consensus on the role of the OSCE as an institution and why it remains insignificant as a conflict resolution mechanism.²⁰

Consequently, in August 2008 it was down to the EU under its French Council Presidency to mediate in the conflict between Russia and Georgia. The negotiation of a ceasefire agreement and the stationing of an EU Monitoring Mission can be viewed as a success for European diplomacy. The subsequent debate on the reform of the Euro-Atlantic security institutions,²¹ the integration of Russia and conflict resolution in the post-Soviet region have given a new impulse to relations with Russia, however they have failed to initiate fundamental change.²² The Russian-Georgian war can be understood as a turning point for Russian foreign policy, demonstrating to the Moscow leadership the poor condition of its own army. As a result, a major military reform was begun in the autumn of the same year designed to modernize and reduce troop numbers.²³

Russia's position in respect of the conflicts in the post-Soviet region also underwent a change, in particular as a result of the August

2008 war. While preventing any further changes to the status quo had been a central component of Russian foreign policy up to that time, with its 'Politics of Strength' in relation to Georgia and the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Moscow had created new realities. However, Moscow had also gone too far for its post-Soviet allies. None of Russia's alliance partners were willing to recognize the independence of the two breakaway Georgian provinces. This demonstrated the limits of Russia's alliance policy and its influence in the post-Soviet region. In the wake of the events in August 2008 the post-Soviet states strove to establish a counterweight to Russia's influence in their region and find new regional and international alliance partners.

This was accompanied by a change in Russia's strategy towards conflicts in its 'backyard'. It became clear to the Russian leadership that their status quo policy in respect of the conflicts in the post-Soviet region would lead to a weakening of their influence in the medium-term. In addition to the EU, which is becoming increasingly active in its new neighbourhood, it is above all the regional powers such as Turkey, Iran and China that are gaining influence. For this reason President Medvedev has begun to mediate in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and support the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement in a total of four summits with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to date, in July 2009, June and October 2010, as well as March 2011²⁴. Moscow has also shown a willingness to

compromise in respect of the Transnistrian conflict, to negotiate with the EU and work towards a solution, as the Meseberg Memorandum has shown.

► *V. Reorientation of Russian foreign and security policy*

This new Russian rhetoric appears all the more surprising considering that up until the end of 2008 it was the conflict that tended to dominate relations between Russia and the 'West'. Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000–2008) was characterized by continual economic growth on the basis of rising oil prices and the stabilisation of the Russian state. This led to an increasing self confidence amongst the Russian elite in foreign policy matters and a vehement demand for the recognition of its former world power status. The goal of the Russian elite was and is to be recognised by the USA as an important power in international relations and to divide regions into zones of influence. In this context, Russia sees itself as the central hegemonic power in the post-Soviet region. The aim is to be recognised by the international community as the regional power in the post-Soviet region. This is to be achieved by an international mandate for Russian dominated organizations such as the CSTO²⁵ to intervene in this region as well as a halt to NATO expansion. Russia made its red line clear during the dispute over NATO accession for Georgia and the Ukraine, as

well as the planned stationing of a US missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic.

For the Russian political elite it is not the EU that is the central stakeholder in international and European security matters, but the United States together with NATO. The EU and its member states are primarily seen as economic partners and the most important market for Russian raw materials. Above all, European and Russian security interests converge in the post-Soviet region, over the conflicts emerging from the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union. This includes the ethnic conflicts in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Nagorno-Karabakh) as well as the secession conflict in the Republic of Moldova (Transnistria). Russia is an important player in these conflicts, either directly or indirectly, and is active in nearly all regions with so called 'peace troops'. In addition to its role as 'peacemaker', Moscow frequently adopts the position of one of the parties to the conflict and consequently is part of the problem, rather than its solution.²⁶ The EU is faced with the central challenge of finding a mechanism for conflict resolution in the common neighbourhood, with the inclusion of Russia.

During Vladimir Putin's presidency an audit of Russia's foreign policy resources was conducted which has been completed under his successor, Dmitry Medvedev. This has led to the recognition amongst the Russian leadership that Russia's resources are limited, that both its military and economic

means are shrinking. Consequently, in his internet article 'Russia Forwards' Medvedev called for a diversification of the Russian economy, away from oil and gas, and its modernization based on technological innovation.²⁷ In order to initiate a genuine change in Russian economic policy, foreign investment and technology transfer from the EU states and other developed countries is required. The recognition that the economic modernization of Russia is only possible with Western assistance has strengthened the Russian leadership's rhetoric of cooperation, especially since 2009.

The global financial crisis at the end of 2008/ beginning of 2009 clearly demonstrated to Russia's political and economic elite the dependence of their economy on the world economy and oil prices. As a result, the willingness to cooperate with the USA on questions of security policy and push forward economic modernization with the help of the EU states has grown. In order to attract foreign investment and technologies to Russia, the USA and in particular the EU, have been presented as partners as opposed to rivals in various of the Russian leadership's foreign policy speeches and papers. Examples of this rhetoric of cooperation can be found in President Medvedev's speech in front of Russian ambassadors and representatives of international organizations in July 2010²⁸ and in Putin's proposal for an economic community stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok during an economic meeting in Berlin in late 2010.²⁹

This new rhetoric was also made possible by developments in the post-Soviet region advantageous to Russia. This includes, in the first instance, the election of the new Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich, in February 2010, who has adopted a more Russia-friendly stance in his rhetoric and policies compared to his predecessor. His commitment to the neutral status of his country and the conclusion of a treaty with Russia on the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukrainian Sevastopol, in exchange for a price reduction on Russian gas, have pushed the possibility of NATO membership for Ukraine into the far distance. Furthermore, the renewed isolation of the Belarusian President Lukashenko from the West following the brutal actions of Belarusian security forces against demonstrators after the presidential elections in December 2010³⁰ and the fall of Kyrgyzstan's President, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who had fallen out of favour in Moscow, have, for the time being, strengthened Russia's influence in this region.

However, fundamentally, there has been no change in the principles and goals of Russian foreign policy. Moscow has become more conscious of its international interdependence and some of its goals currently overlap with those of the EU and USA. Russia is also concerned about the developments in Iran and is worried about the destabilizing influence on the Caucasus and its southern territories. The war in Afghanistan has also led to increasing pressure on the authoritarian regimes in

Central Asia as transit zones and retreats for drug trafficking, criminal structures and radical Islamic groups. Above all, Moscow fears the destabilisation of the Central Asian states, which could have a direct effect on its borders, as well as the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, which has made Russia into an important market for drugs. At the same time, the latest developments in North Africa, in particular the air strikes against the Qaddafi regime, have shown the limits of common political denominators, and with it 'Russia's new West policy'. These events provide an exemplary demonstration of the differences within the Russian elite over President Medvedev's rapprochement with US and EU positions.³¹

► *VI. Old goals, new rhetoric*

However, from a Russian perspective, nothing has changed in respect of the post-Soviet states and the resolution of conflicts in this region. Russia continues to define this region as its sphere of influence in which it is facing increasing competition from the EU. It sees itself as the central hegemonic power in this region. Through its unilateral recognition of the independence of the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the stationing of Russian troops in these regions, Moscow has ostensibly annexed these regions. The Russian leadership is not willing to fulfil a central part of the ceasefire agreement with the EU and withdraw

Russian troops from this region. Due to unwillingness to compromise on both sides, negotiations with Georgia have not advanced, which limits the EU's scope for action.

In August 2010, despite the summit meetings with the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia addressing the issue of mediation in the Karabakh conflict, as mentioned above, an agreement was signed with Armenia granting an extension on the lease for a Russian base in the country to 2044. In exchange for this contract Russia supplies Armenia with modern weapons.³² This agreement undermined the efforts of the international community to mediate in the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh and has led to renewed threats of an armaments race from the Azerbaijani side. The resource-rich Azerbaijan is planning a renewed increase in its military budget for 2011 compared to 2010 of approximately 45 percent to 3.1 billion USD, within a total national budget of 15.9 billion USD.³³ At the same time, the Russian leadership is undermining its own efforts at promoting talks between Baku and Yerevan, which raises the question as to how seriously Russia is about holding the summit meeting. Thus the Russian leadership appears to be continuing its policy of maintaining and fomenting conflict in order to secure its own influence.

This also raises the question as to whether Russia is really interested in a genuine resolution to the conflict in the Republic of Moldova, in cooperation with Germany and the EU. Since the Meseberg Memorandum

in June 2010 no concrete bilateral steps have been taken by Russia and the EU for a resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. Instead, Moscow has intensified its initiatives in respect of Moldova in order to regain influence and strengthen its negotiating position following a pro-European change of government in 2009. For example, the Russian Ambassador in Chisinau, Valery Kuzmin, has offered the Republic of Moldova a lower delivery price for Russian gas in exchange for acceptance of the Russian military presence in Transnistria. This offer is interpreted as a response to increasing western activity in respect of a resolution of the Transnistrian conflict and renegotiations on the stationing of conventional troops in Europe.³⁴

The German attempt to link Russia's willingness to cooperate in achieving a solution to the Transnistrian conflict with the establishment of a high ranking committee for foreign and security policy at the EU level, appears to be undermined by the Russian side. Russia's Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov has demanded from the Hungarian EU Council Presidency that the two goals be separated, in particular to accelerate the start of the committee for foreign and security policy.³⁵ Up to now, all progress in negotiations on Transnistria have failed due to Russian insistence that its troops will only be withdrawn once a decision has been made on the new political status of Transnistria. As long as Russian troops serve to maintain Russian influence in the region and are not replaced by an international civil

or police mission, there will be no genuine breakthrough in this conflict.

► *VII. Reality of cooperation in security policy with Russia and future prospects*

Current Russian policy with respect to the Georgian conflict, Nagorno-Karabkh and Transnistria, shows that there has been no fundamental change. Russia continues to use the conflicts in order to exert influence on the participating states and does not have a genuine interest in their resolution. A resolution of the conflict in the case of Transnistria would lead to a loss in Russian influence and accelerate the integration of the Republic of Moldova in the EU. As the Russian political elite continues to think of international relations in terms of zero-sum games, perceiving the EU as a competitor in terms of relations with the post-Soviet states, cooperative and integrational initiatives like those of the German government will prove ineffective, if no consequences are drawn from inaction.

Russia's participation in the Meseberg initiative and the efforts at an improvement in security policy relations within the framework of the Weimar Triangle are not the result of a shift in Russian foreign policy. Instead, they appear to be part of the improved climate following the US

'reset' and Russia's increased willingness to cooperate as a result of the global financial crisis and its own reform failures. While the German Federal Government and the EU attempt to influence Russian foreign policy and conflict resolution in the post-Soviet region by means of a politics of small steps, Russia is interested in rediscussing the big questions of European security policy. With its proposal for a new security treaty for Europe, Russia is intent on a renegotiation of European security structures, while the EU and its member states are attempting to solve problems within the existing framework. It is for this reason that they are talking at cross purposes. While Russia is attempting to influence European security structures, above all through a new security dialogue with the EU, the German Federal Government, with its offer of a security dialogue, is attempting to win Russia for the solution of existing conflicts in the common neighbourhood. While Germany is intent on creating a precedent for good cooperation and conflict resolution, Russian is intent on preventing just that. Within the terms of Russia's foreign policy, this would lead to a loss of power in the entire region.

In principle, a rapprochement between Russian and western perceptions of the risks in respect of Afghanistan and Iran cannot be transferred to other conflicts, in particular not to the post-Soviet states. In the first instance, Russia does not see the post-Soviet conflicts as a threat to its security, but as a means to maintain its influence. A solution of the conflicts would increase the scope for

states such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia or the Republic of Moldova to develop greater political and economic independence from Russia. For this reason, even in the face of a very attractive offer, Russia's willingness to cooperate in the resolution of these conflicts through a package of compromises is limited. Bilateral negotiations, which due to their extreme flexibility could prove expedient for the EU, are also unlikely to bring about a rapid breakthrough. Even if President Medvedev's cooperative approach is taken seriously on the German or EU side, it is not capable of winning a majority within the Russian political elite. In the event of a change in the Russian leadership following the presidential elections in 2012, this approach could be rapidly replaced by a new policy. Above all, Medvedev has not succeeded in initiating a credible structural change to Russian domestic and foreign policy.

The EU's Eastern Partnership urgently needs to be expanded to include the field of conflict resolution, the key factor in relations with virtually all of the Eastern neighbors. Furthermore, a greater financial and personnel commitment to conflict management in the region is required on the part of the EU. Without Russia, no conflict resolution will be possible due to its military and diplomatic involvement in all conflicts. For this reason, the EU must increase its pressure on Russia and give these conflicts a higher priority within bilateral negotiations. Only when Germany takes its own initiative seriously and is prepared to clash with Russia on the issue of Transnistria, will it be able to

build up the necessary pressure on Russia in order to bring about a compromise. Bilateral agreements with Russia must contain clear, monitorable goals in order to react in the event of a lack of progress or non-compliance. Russia has no interest in risking a conflict with its most important trading partners in the EU over the issue of Transnistria. Although Russia must be included in all initiatives, cooperation with Russia must not prevent the realization of European goals in the common neighbourhood (conflict resolution, democratization and open markets) or even lead to the acceptance of Russian principles and negotiation tactics. However, as long as the EU and its member states fight shy of confronting Russia, ultimately continuing to accommodate to the status quo, Russia will be content to display a purely rhetorical commitment to cooperation.

► *VIII. Prospects for the success of the Weimar Triangle in respect of Russia and the post-Soviet states*

The states of the Weimar Triangle, in particular Germany and Poland, are the key European states in respect of relations to Russia and the Eastern neighbourhood. In the transitional phase leading up to the establishment of a credible common EU foreign policy they should take the initiative

in cultivating good relations with the Russian leadership within the framework of summit diplomacy, as well as increasing the profile of the EU in the field of conflict resolution with respect to its Eastern neighbors and Russia.

The dependence of Russia on the EU as the most important energy market and central investor, as well the necessity to import technological know-how from the member states, should be used to greater effect in achieving compromises in respect of the conflicts in the post-Soviet region. Even though such a policy could bring short-term economic disadvantages, in the long-term it will lead to greater credibility and the possibility of change in the entire region, including the issue of greater market liberalization. This will involve, on the one hand, increasing the profile of European policy in respect of the states of the Eastern Partnership and adjusting EU instruments to the actual conditions in these states. On the other hand, Russia must be shown that the EU will not accept any spheres of influence. This is also of central importance for Brussels' credibility in the whole post-Soviet region. For the EU it is important that it makes a greater commitment to its Eastern neighbourhood as Russia's influence in the region will decline in the long term. This will happen due to the aggressive overtones of its current policy and its internal reform deficits – which will have wide ranging consequences for the EU.

In this context, the absence of consensus on policy in respect of Russia, neither within the

EU nor the Weimar Triangle is problematic. While Germany is attempting to integrate Russia into European structures, the goal of the Polish government is to demonstrate to Russia its own limits. While Berlin tends to be willing to make concessions to Russia in respect of the post-Soviet states, Warsaw intends to intensify its relations with these states. However, there are signs of a rapprochement between German and Polish positions in respect of relations with Russia and the other post-Soviet states. In this regard, the Weimar Triangle could become an important institution for the coordination and rapprochement between Germany and Poland (with French participation as an important member state) within European Ostpolitik, and thus a trust building element and lever for the practical implementation of policy within the EU. Germany's economic interests and Poland's geopolitical fears will, without doubt, continue to influence the politics of these countries. However, a change in this policy tradition would open up opportunities for both Germany and Poland and the future of European Ostpolitik.

Endnotes

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