

The EU, Russia and the crisis of the post-Cold War European order



The post-Cold War European order has come to an end and the EU now finds itself confronting a new Russia – one determined to turn itself in a powerful international player. Faced with this, **Ivan Krastev** argues that the EU needs to adopt strategies that stop Russia from sending it into a benevolent global irrelevance

The immediate post-Cold War period was an exceptional and admirable decade in European history. It expanded the frontiers of freedom and democracy and made the reunification of Europe possible. But this admirable decade is over. Today, we face a completely different reality. While the capitalist revolution has triumphed in the world, the democratic revolution is in retreat. The US-dominated unipolar world is falling apart and the EU has lost some of its ability to shape realities in its own periphery. Many societies have had second thoughts about the export of democracy. EU expansion is on hold. The US and NATO have lost prestige and legitimacy in the context of the Iraq war and the operation in Afghanistan. Backed by the soaring price of oil, Vladimir Putin has turned Russia into a powerful international player. "Russia, previously a Pluto in the western solar system, has spun out of its orbit, powered by the determination to find its own system".

Russia's withdrawal from the Treaty of Conventional Forces, its deliberate efforts to block the work of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the field of election monitoring, and Moscow's refusal to ratify the reform of the European Court on Human Rights (Protocol No 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights), marked the end of the post-Cold War European order. It is clear that Russia and the EU have opposing views on the nature of the post-Cold War European order and on the sources of instability in Eurasia. The latest crisis, concerning the recognition of Kosovo's independence, is the best illustration of this new reality.

In short, continuing the policies of the 1990s in this new context creates grounds for reintroducing sphere-of-influence politics in Europe, rather than expanding the borders of democracy. Breaking with the policies of the 1990s also presents a risk. The EU is not, and cannot be, a traditional 19th

century style great power. The EU, by its very design, is an ideological power that tries to expand principles and institutions which it perceives to have a universal worth.

So, any re-thinking of EU policy towards Russia should start with the recognition that Russia will remain a global player during the next decade, but that it's unlikely Russia will become a mature liberal democracy during that period. The EU should also recognise that Russia has legitimate concerns about the asymmetrical impact of the end of the Cold War on its security. Russia felt betrayed in its expectations that the end of the Cold War would mean the demilitarisation of central and eastern Europe. And while NATO enlargement did not bring any real security threats to Russia, it has changed the military balance between Russia and the west and it has fueled Moscow's revisionism. Russia has legitimate reasons to suspect that the west's policy of democracy promotion is more interested in promoting western foreign policy objectives than in strengthening democratic institutions. Western blessing for the bombing of the Russian parliament in 1993 and western endorsement of the "free and fair" re-election of Boris Yeltsin in 1996 have given democracy promotion a dubious name in Moscow.

What the EU and the US can offer Russia today is not so much a grand bargain, but an opportunity for reinventing the post-Cold War European order. Trade-offs, like Moscow's tolerance of Kosovo's independence, or for the softening of the western position on the installation of America's anti-missile defense shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, will not work as a model for a relationship. The

EU should focus on establishing institutional foundations for the co-existence of a post-modern empire-in-progress in the western part of the continent, and a post-imperial nation-state-in-progress in Russia. Both projects are internally controversial and fragile. The world hasn't experienced a state-like structure that's similar to the present EU and it hasn't it really experienced a modern Russian nation state either.

The EU today cannot be described anymore as federalist state in the making – it is something much more complex and undefined. It resembles something closer to post-colonial India, with its mixture of languages, legal regimes, traditions and sensitivities, than it does post-war Germany or France. In the powerful metaphor of Jan Zielonka the post-enlargement EU is not a kind of Westphalia federation; it is more a kind of neo-medieval empire. There is no European demos and there probably never will be – but there is kind of European public. There are no final borders but moving borders and variable geometries. And it was Count Sergei Witte, Prime Minister under Nicholas II, who said there was no such thing as Russia, but only a Russian empire.

The post-modern European order has emerged out of the ruins of such Cold War institutions as the OSCE and the Treaty of Conventional Weapons. It was shaped by the EU's eastern enlargement and the understanding that enlargement was nothing less than the reunification of Europe. From Brussels there was no immediate pressure to re-invent the institutional foundation of the European order because EU enlargement was the institutional foundation of the new

European order. Brussels was molding the new European order by transforming the economy and the political institutions on its periphery. The democratisation of its neighbours was the EU's common foreign policy message to the former communist societies – essentially: if you behave like us, you will become one of us. This is no longer true. The new reality in Europe in the next decade will be the emergence of a post-enlargement EU and a resurgent Russia that presents itself as an alternative model to the EU.

The real source of confrontation between Russia and the EU today is not primarily based on rival interests or unshared values – it is political incompatibility. Russia's

challenge to the EU cannot be reduced to the issue of energy dependency and Moscow's ambition to dominate its "near abroad" – a region that happens to be the EU's new neighborhood. At the heart of the current crisis is not the clash between democracy and authoritarianism – history demonstrates that democratic and authoritarian states can easily cooperate – but the clash between that of a post-modern state, embodied by the EU, and the traditional modern state embodied by Russia.

The EU, which emphasizes human rights and openness, threatens the Kremlin's sovereign democracy project. Russia's insistence on a balance of power approach, and its mercantilist geopolitical



MATTERS OF OPINION

Ukraine opts for closer ties with Russia than with the US

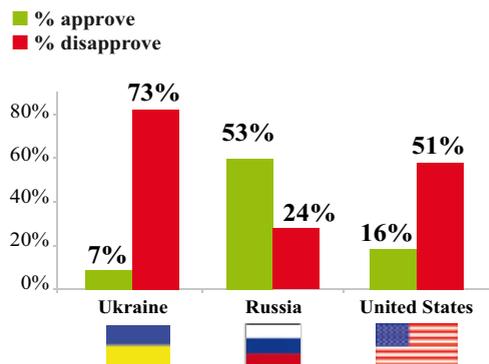
Ukrainians are more inclined to favour close ties with Russia than with the United States, according to Gallup polls carried out in the first half of 2007.

When questioned, almost half (46%) of Ukrainians said it was important to have a good relationship with Moscow, even if this came at the cost of friendship with Washington. Only 10% said that Ukraine should put US-Ukraine relations first, regardless of the impact this might have on their country's relationship with Russia. Over a third (36%) volunteered the response that it was important to have good links with both powers.

When asked their opinion of the respective regimes, there was considerably more support for Russian than American leadership. Over half (53%) approved of leadership in Moscow, compared to just 16% support for that of the US. Ukraine's own government fared worse: just seven in a hundred people were positive

about their leaders' performance, while three-quarters (73%) of those questioned were critical.

HOW DO UKRAINIANS JUDGE THE LEADERSHIP IN RUSSIA, THE US AND THEIR OWN COUNTRY?



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hardball philosophy, is stimulating the re-nationalisation of the foreign policy of EU member states. In Moscow, the EU's policy of democracy promotion awakens the nightmare of ethnic and religious politics and the threat of the territorial disintegration of the Russian Federation. At the same time, faced with the invasion of Russian state-minded companies, EU member states are tempted to ring-fence certain sectors of their economies (such as domestic energy markets), thus threatening the liberal economic order that is at the centre of the European project.

Russia, on the other hand, feels threatened by the invasion of western-funded non-governmental organisations.

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The Kremlin is tempted to recreate the police state in order to prevent foreign interference in its domestic politics. Brussels is ready to endorse the Central Asian autocrats in order to limit its dependence on Russian gas. In short, what threatens Europe today is not mutually destructive nuclear war, but the mutual destabilisation of Russia and the EU – this could result in the marginalisation of Europe in global politics.

The western policy community presently demonstrates an unwillingness to focus on the problem of European order. It rejects all of Russia's attempts for a renegotiation of the Treaty on Conventional Weapons, as well as the mandate and the agenda of the OSCE. The conventional wisdom is that the result of such renegotiations would involve a retreat from the achievements of the 1990s. But how correct is this judgment?

The EU cannot act as a fervent guardian of the post-Cold War status quo without risking a total collapse of the institutional infrastructure of post-Cold War Europe. In reality, it is in Brussels' interest to take the initiative and to engage Russia in a dialogue over the institutional foundations of what has become a shaken European order. The EU's main objective in political terms should be to preserve the distinctive character of this order. More so than the world at large, Europe today is founded on the centrality of human rights and the rule of law. This is something that Brussels should fight for and preserve.

The EU's main objective in institutional terms, regarding its relations with Russia, should be to centre the institutions of the

new European order around the EU as a principal policy actor and not on its member states. The dueling nature of Russia's regime – capitalist and non-democratic, European and anti-EU – and the finalisation of EU institutional reforms, suggest such a strategy. The Kremlin is not rejecting any of the basic principles of the democratic west. Officially, it is not rejecting liberal democracy but trying to define its national model. The Kremlin is not officially rejecting the primacy of human rights and a rule-of-law based society, it is simply not practicing them. Moscow's major complaint is not about the west's standards, but about the west's double standards.

The EU should make use of this ambiguity at the heart of Russia's sovereign democracy. It should use the fact that the legitimacy of Russia's current regime inside the country is based, to a large extent, on the perception that it is a regime that strives to bring Russia back into the European civilization. It is true that Russia does not dream of being part of the EU anymore. However, Russia's stability depends on preserving the European nature of its regime. And it is not by accident that – unlike his central Asian fellow-presidents – Vladimir Putin decided to step down from office and let go of power after the end of his second term. The Kremlin, better than anybody, knows that the regime will be doomed at precisely the moment when the Russian elite loses its European legitimacy.

Brussels should use the fact that the Lisbon treaty unblocked the EU reform agenda and allowed Brussels to concentrate on building an EU-centered European order that would guarantee the co-existence of the EU's post-modern empire and the

post-imperial Russia – without damaging the interests of third countries. The transformation of the Contact Group on Kosovo, consisting of six countries (the US, Russia, France, the UK, Germany, and Italy) into the Troika Process (consisting of the US, Russia and the EU) is the model for such a re-institutionalisation of Europe.

Creating institutional incentives for the EU's unity would help Europe overcome the structural contradiction of the European project. The transformation of the OSCE into a political forum where EU member states will be individually represented by the EU, for example, could be such an institutional innovation that can block Moscow's effort to split the union. If Russia's strategy aims to erode the union by focusing on bilateral relations with selected member states, Brussels' priority should be to institutionalise the union as Russia's negotiating partner.

We need a new European order that will not only allow for the co-existence of a post-modern EU and a post-imperial Russia, but will allow for a co-existence based on the principles of the Council of Europe. The EU and the US cannot pretend anymore that they have the legitimacy or the capacity to transform Russia into a liberal democracy in the coming decade. But the EU should not allow Russia to send it into a benevolent irrelevance. □

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