

## Thinking Beyond Putin

Presentation on VII. EU-Russia Dialogue 18<sup>th</sup> July 2014 in Cadenabbia

**My theme today is how to deal with Russia in the long term – and I will not hide from you that I served in NATO headquarters in Brussels twice four years, with much involvement in NATO’s transformation after the fall of the Berlin Wall. So my view is colored more by the NATO than by the EU perspective – still having in mind the adage that these two institutions reside in the same city but live on different planets.**

So I will concentrate on the long term for which I have some ideas, but let me start by taking a clear stand regarding what is going on in Ukraine. What are the reasons for the present situation? After gaining independence from the Soviet Union, the country failed to produce economic progress and societal modernization comparable to, say, Poland. When the opportunity seemed to present itself, the bearers of hope in the “Orange Revolution” contributed most to destroying that hope. During the reign of President Yanukovich, corruption and kleptocracy became prevalent. When under Russian pressure he refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, leading to the Majdan revolt against his regime - students and young people at first – but radicalizing in reaction to growing violent repression. The Kremlin used this development as an opportunity - and the alleged suppression of Russian-speaking Ukrainians as a pretext - for covert military action, aiming at destabilization mainly in Eastern Ukraine, and for

spreading influence. The chance for splitting off and annexing the Crimea came “in passing” as it were, but seemed well prepared technically “just in case”.

It has to be noted that Moscow, and particularly Putin, have never put up with the independent sovereignty of Ukraine, and that the “victory of history” in “taking home” the peninsula is in line with the tradition of “collecting Russian soil” since Ivan the Terrible.

Of course there are deficits in Ukraine regarding democracy, state of law, corruption, legitimacy of the transition government, influence of radical forces and a centralization that has not sufficiently allowed all groups in the society to participate. And since the founding of the NATO-Ukraine Commission in 1997 I have been watching the perpetually failed military reform. But nothing of all this, also not mistakes on the side of the EU and NATO, justifies the military intervention, the infiltration of agents and armed provocateurs, the shifting of national borders with military force, the seizure of parts of a sovereign state. We see here Russian revisionism, fed from great power nostalgia and the chagrin about the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At the same time this is the well-known historical pattern of diverting from inner problems through aggression against exterior “adversaries”. In addition, the success of a westward-oriented democracy in Ukraine would be very threatening for the ruler in the

Kremlin. He will do everything, almost everything, to prevent it.

I mentioned mistakes of the EU and will be frank there: We should have been more successful in winning Russia for the EU's Eastern Neighborhood Policy. But the "either-or" alternative for Ukraine came from Russia, not from the EU. And Foreign Minister Lavrov's talk about the EU's "sphere of power" reveals a gross misinterpretation, making understandable why the Eurasian Union is an almost logical counter scheme. Also, I found it wrong on the EU's side, to link Ms. Tymoshenko's fate to the Association Agreement, deplorable as the ever greater politicization and instrumentalization of the Ukrainian judiciary was.

NATO has not much to do with the present development. Since its Summit meeting in Bucharest 2008 it has been quite clear that a possible NATO membership of Ukraine is far away. Putin's argument that he had to act before Crimea fell into NATO's hands is particularly crass propaganda.

I will not talk a lot about the necessary next steps for Ukraine, the leadership has an immense task in front of it. The Government has the right and the duty to restore order, in a measured and proportionate way, one would hope. But Russian involvement has to end. There are ever more proofs to that effect. This does not mean "preconditions". One should negotiate with everyone who is ready to negotiate.

I trust that the Ukrainian Government will do the right steps – actions, not just words – regarding equal rights of all societal groups. But this is difficult in front of guns guided by an outside power.

In the short term, it is clear that the West cannot tolerate the violations of fundamental rules determining Europe's post-Cold-War order, must not recognize the Crimea annexation, has to show its

indignation and must deter Putin from continuing. Sanctions are problematic, I concede, but I also believe that Putin would already have gone further in Eastern Ukraine without the threat of tougher sanctions hanging above him. In the German debate, "Russland-Versteher" has become a critical characterization. I, for my part, like to make use of the possibilities for differentiation the German language offers. So I am outing myself as a "Putin-Versteher", but I have no "Verständnis" for his course of action. The confidence that is in shatters has to be restored by him. Let us discuss who "has to give back credibility", to use a formulation by one participant.

This is the short term. But in the long term we will still have to live with Russia, will have to organize security *with* Russia, although it is very natural that, particularly for some MOE NATO members, security *from* Russia has become more relevant again. In the longer run we should vigorously demand from Russia "new thinking" in foreign and security policy. Do you remember that this was the programmatic term with which Gorbachev started his offers to the West of détente and disarmament, proclaiming a "common house of Europe"? Putin acts to the contrary.

And the West, particularly NATO, should facilitate such new thinking by self-critically acknowledging its share of the responsibility for the worsening of the relationship with Russia over the last 25 years. A few points on that: We insufficiently understood Russian "political psychology" and what has aptly been called "imperial phantom pain" – expressed in Putin's famous lament that the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the collapse of the Soviet Union. Imagine; not the First World War, not Hitlerism, not the Second World War, not the Holocaust – no, the dissolution of the USSR! I was present, when in his

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July 2014

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February 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference Putin expressed a lot of bitterness about the West "doing what it wants".

Indeed, after the end of the Cold War, not enough attention was given to the question of Russia's place in the European security order, and Russian proposals, for example, for the adaptation of the CFE treaty on conventional forces, were flatly disregarded.

The NATO accession ambitions of Georgia and Ukraine were handled insensibly. When at the Bucharest Summit in 2008 the US wanted to push for them the Membership Action Plan, they were not at all mature for NATO membership. But more importantly, no understanding was sought with Russia, whilst the first and second enlargement rounds were "cushioned" as it were, by the establishment respectively upgrading of the NATO-Russia Council. Too late was the now so controversial missile defense plan, which should be in the common interest, offered to Russia as a cooperative project. Also, the West underestimated what Kosovo's independence meant for Russia (although the analogy with the Crimea annexation constructed by Putin – and supported by Schröder - is totally flawed). Finally, the NATO-Russia Council was insufficiently used and developed. We should certainly maintain it - for better times -, and not renege its very detailed provisions.

Russia must be won for a return to the path of cooperative security policy that is not determined by zero-sum thinking, where one side can only gain at the expense of the other. Russia's equal place in the European security order is a decisive issue for the future. For deserving that, Russia must constructively contribute to solving regional and global problems instead of merely using nuisance power and prevention force. This includes the necessity to actively help tackling the so-called "frozen conflicts" such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and

Georgia, instead of keeping them simmering in order to destabilize neighbors.

"New thinking" on the Russian side would also mean giving up Cold War clichés about NATO and their instrumentalization. In their Founding Act of 1997 NATO and Russia declared no longer to regard each other as adversaries. Russia must recognize that dangers for its security come from the South and perhaps from the East, not from the West. It must leave behind geopolitical and strategic categories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Respect for the commitments, rules and institutions included in the Paris Charter of 1990 are to be the basis of cooperative security policy in Europe.

Moreover, the paradigm of the "near abroad" is destabilizing and alarming for the countries concerned. The Kremlin must understand the fears roused by the proclaimed "obligation" to "protect Russians wherever they live". This is supported by the openhanded issuance of Russian passports and a history policy of "Stalin revived". If Russia does not recognize sovereignty, integrity and independence of the post-Soviet states and actively contribute to their reassurance instead of undermining it, it harms its own long-term interests. The triumph about "returning" Crimea will be short-lived.

I never found Obama's "reset" to be a good metaphor. We not only need a restart, but a new programme. In this vein, Russia must be persuaded to use "21<sup>st</sup>-century currency", not methods of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for today's problems. It should overcome categories like "spheres of influence", "encirclement", "balance of power" and "isolation". And it must realize that huge Russia can only "isolate" itself, by actions like against Georgia and now Ukraine. Instead of "NATO centrism" which Russia criticizes in Western security policy, there seem to be "NATO fixation" in Moscow, and now even an "EU fixation", if I hear Foreign

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Minister Lavrov talk about the European Union's "sphere of power" as quoted before.

I will end with a few concrete ideas, some of which I have been propagating for a long time, for instance in a little book with which, in 2009, I laid out some ideas for NATO's new Strategic Concept.

The NATO Russia Council needs a substantial agenda, where Russia accepts that it cannot co-decide on NATO internal matters, and where NATO offers a very broad menu for joint analysis and action "at 29", based on common security interests, and including subjects such as terrorism, proliferation, peacekeeping, missile defense, airspace management, civil emergencies, defense reform, logistics. But the list of subjects could be further developed, and should perhaps be prioritised. A candid discussion of the Russian foreign and security documents could be one agenda item and also Russian explanations about its immense rise in military budgets over the last five years while all Western countries have reduced them.

The NATO-Russia Council should play a much more prominent role in crisis management. Remember that we harshly criticized Russia for leaving it in the Kosovo crisis – only to do the same during the Georgia War. The council should not be seen as a fair-weather institution. It is right, in my view, that in the present crisis only the concrete cooperation was stopped and the NRC maintained. But one meeting after three months is not good enough. The NATO-Russia Council should meet almost in permanence; and perhaps, even prior to the annexation of Crimea, NATO should have invited Mr. Putin for a summit meeting of the NRC!

One can think of further helpful steps in the future: A constructive move on NATO's side could lie in a certain interest in, respect for and dialogue with the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) with which Moscow appears to emulate to some

extent NATO (in terms of bureaucracy, acronym creation and document output not wholly unsuccessfully). And it is perhaps revealing that at NATO Headquarters there has for a couple of years no longer been the office of the "Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Central and Eastern European Affairs" – a function where at the time most constructive work was done in bringing the two sides together and providing the Secretary General and the Council "a second opinion". (Some of you may remember Chris Donnelly.)

In his 2008 Berlin speech, then President Medvedev made the proposal for a pan-European security treaty. Its content, a security architecture with authority over NATO in a legally binding construction smacked of Soviet ideas of many decades ago. But in spite of this there would have been no harm in making such ideas subject of an intense dialogue with Russia and creating a permanent, structured forum for that. I never understood Western reticence. It should, after all, not be forgotten that the Helsinki Final Act, which had so positive consequences in European history, was the eventual result of a Soviet initiative that had originally scared many in the West.

Finally: True, the CFE treaty is dead. Regarding the numbers of tanks, APCs, artillery, airplanes and helicopters, that is not tragic, because we are all below the limits. But in terms of confidence building, transparency, mutual reassurance I would like to see a new departure in conventional arms control.

Final remark: I have tried here to "think beyond Putin". That was also the title I wanted to give to a contribution I published in the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" 3 ½ months ago. I was then somewhat shocked about the title chosen by the paper: "NATO's mistakes". But that reminded me of this year's Schlangenbad talks, a German-Russian dialogue we have been regularly conducting for 15 years now. This time they

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were of course dominated by the Ukraine crisis, and in his final statement one of the organizers, Reinhard Krumm from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, said to the Russian participants: "From our side you heard a lot of self-criticism. A little bit of that would also be useful and welcome from your side!"

What I have sketched as "new thinking" in Russian foreign and security policy, should be promoted and encouraged by a farsighted Western policy. Also, scholars and politicians should think more about the problems of what has come to be called "postimperial spaces". One day such new thinking will prevail, albeit perhaps not with Putin. But he may not be at the helm as long as he and his presently enthusiastic supporters think.

In any event - and that is my advice to NATO, the European Union, the US and also the German Government, long-term offers for collaboration including the renewed serious encouragement of cooperative as opposed to confrontational security should be elaborated and held in store. Hopefully the Ukraine crisis will not escalate in a way that such prospects become even more distant!