European Security after the Kosovo Crisis: The Role of Russia

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The international crisis around Kosovo resulting from NATO's military intervention in Yugoslavia should be regarded as a watershed in post-Cold War international relations, since it drastically affected Russia's relations with the West and particularly with NATO and the USA. It can also be viewed as culmination and logical conclusion of the over-ripe Russian-Western contradictions in the field of security and the growing gap between Russian and Western threat perceptions. This crisis entailed dramatic consequences for Russia's domestic development, having reinforced anti-Western feeling and nostalgia for a strong hand which would reinstate Russia's international prestige. The future of European security will depend on the post-Kosovo relationship that emerges between Russia, the USA and Europe.

The international crisis over Kosovo, resulting from NATO's military intervention in Yugoslavia, undoubtedly has opened a new page in post-Cold War international relations. Although the end of NATO's military campaign against Yugoslavia and the deployment of NATO and Russian peacekeeping forces in Kosovo under the UN mandate brought a surface peace to this region, the second volume of Yugoslavia's tragic history is not yet finished. It would not be an exaggeration to say that everything is at stake in Yugoslavia now. Russia's relations with the West, the future of the Euro-Atlantic partnership and European security this century will depend on the outcome of the international community's post-conflict strategy and on how Russia and the West emerge from the Kosovo problem.

RUSSIA'S PERCEPTION OF THE KOSOVO CRISIS

NATO military action against Yugoslavia generated the sharpest and most dangerous confrontation between Moscow and Washington, or perhaps more accurately, Russia and NATO, since the time of the Berlin
and Caribbean crises of the early 1960s. NATO’s bombing shifted the conflict into an absolutely different dimension. It elevated a local ethnic conflict to the rank of an international, political and potential military clash with prospects of bursting out beyond the limits of the Balkans.

From the very first day of NATO’s military intervention, an unprecedented political consensus in Russia emerged on the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, which was perceived as an act of aggression against a sovereign state. The NATO air strikes, which were inspired by Washington, dealt a heavy blow to the UN system of international security, to commonly accepted rules of behaviour in international relations and finally, to the New Political Thinking and democracy in Russia. No matter what humanitarian or political arguments are used to justify NATO’s action, it was a legally indisputable fact of aggression, a violation of the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki principles and the 1975 NATO-Russia Founding Act.

As for the West’s humanitarian arguments, the Russian political elite and public opinion did not take them seriously. If the West really had been concerned about human rights, it would have never gorged and swallowed Chechnya, the largest ethnic cleansing in Srpska Krajina in August 1995, or Ankara’s policy of genocide vis-à-vis Kurds. The latter made NATO’s position especially vulnerable, since Turkey was one of ‘nineteen democratic states’ that decided on the air strikes. It would have been more logical for NATO to start with its own backyard and call Turkey to order.

Furthermore, claims by NATO and Washington of mass killings in Kosovo (‘tens of thousands’, according to President Bill Clinton), the main argument for military intervention, turned out to have been exaggerated. ‘According to UN reports, forensic specialists working under UN auspices have exhumed 2,108 bodies. It is far from certain that all perished as a result of Yugoslav atrocities. Some may have been combatants, others may have been civilians caught in the crossfire between the Yugoslav army and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) or killed by NATO bombs.’ Even US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright began talking instead about hundreds of Kosovo Albanians killed during the Slobodan Milosevic regime. From a purely humanitarian point of view, there is no difference between ‘hundreds’ and ‘tens of thousands’ killed as a result of atrocities. But in justifying a military intervention that devastated half a country and resulted in new victims among the civilian population, numbers matter.

NATO began the operation against Yugoslavia as ‘a demonstrative action’ for its 50th anniversary, designed to assert the alliance’s new role in the world and thus its right to exist after the end of the Cold War. The US and its allies thereby placed enormous political reliance on victory,
and this has nothing to do with the Kosovo problem, Yugoslavia or even all the Balkans.

The use of military force against Yugoslavia hit Russian democrats below the belt, discrediting the very idea of cooperation between Russia and NATO. This action demonstrated total disregard for Russia’s foreign policy interests and a devil-may-care attitude towards the complicated and extraordinarily vulnerable political situation in Russia after the 1998 financial crisis.

With one blow, it changed Russia’s illusions vis-à-vis NATO. When the decision on NATO’s enlargement was made, the Russian political elite still had some questions about NATO’s leadership – for example about NATO’s mission in Europe, the real goals of its enlargement and the character of Russia-NATO partnership. The bombing campaign against Yugoslavia provided clear answers to these questions, dispelling Moscow’s delusions once and for all. One of the main lessons the greater part of the Russian political elite has learned is that no one will take you into consideration if you are weak. It really does not matter that your weakness is the result of attempts to become better, to adjust yourself to the new situation in the world and play by the universally recognized rules of the game. No one in the West loved the USSR. But the USSR inspired fear: therefore, love or no love, hardly anyone would have dared simply to ignore Moscow’s position. This lesson, which the leading democracies of the West have taught Russia, has been one of the most painful.

The aggression against Yugoslavia demonstrated NATO’s transformation. During the Cold War, it was a defensive alliance for protection against external threat: the USSR and the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The end of bipolarity deprived NATO of its very raison d’être and forced it to embark on a process of reforms and readjustment to the new geopolitical situation. But having realized its military superiority in the post-bipolar world and searching for a new meaning for its existence, NATO within a decade became an expansionist alliance with offensive arms forces and operation plans. References to NATO’s defensive past do not reverse this new state of affairs, nor is it refuted by the democratic system of the majority of NATO member countries. Some European countries were fully democratic states when they waged predatory colonial wars, and the same can be said about the United States, which carpet bombed Vietnam 30 years ago.

After demonstrating in the example of Yugoslavia its inability to exist without an external enemy, without the threat of or actual use of military force, without shoving aside international organizations, NATO has emerged as the chief problem for European security and the main obstacle to Russia’s cooperation with the West.
The biggest achievement of the end of bipolarity – the reorientation of the armed forces of former opponents to new contingencies – has been reversed by NATO’s air strikes. Once again, Russia is assessing the NATO bloc as the main potential enemy, perceiving the major threat to the country as coming from the West rather than the South or the East. The Russian strategic community has taken the lessons of Kosovo into account in its military doctrine, and undoubtedly these lessons will shape Russia’s future policy towards the US and NATO.

One question still gnaws at the mind of any political analyst – why did it happen? Why did NATO military aggression, inconceivable during the Cold War, occur during the most favourable period of international relations? There may be two explanations. The first is general. The end of bipolarity, resulting from the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the USSR, has drastically changed the balance of power in favour of the West, namely NATO and the US. The Kosovo crisis is the best evidence that serious shifts in the balance of power are fraught with dramatic changes for the world. The political system of the dominating country – as we see today in the example of the US – is no guarantee that it will behave prudently and in a civilized manner on the world scene. Complete sway breeds euphoria, adventurism and a belief in one’s absolute impunity.

The second explanation is more specific. It was a mistake by Washington to insist on the negotiating model of the Dayton talks, coupling the threat of military action with a negotiating deadline. ‘The Milosevic government might eventually have accepted partition, which could have restored a semblance of peace. Instead, the Clinton administration cynically offered terms that would have nullified Yugoslav control of Kosovo and granted NATO the right to station troops anywhere in Yugoslavia – terms that Mr. Milosevic was bound to refuse.’ Failing to impose on Belgrade the implementation part of the interim agreement, which would have lead to the secession of Kosovo, the US and NATO drove themselves into a corner.

RUSSIA’S POLICY ON THE KOSOVO CRISIS: CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Russia’s policy in the Kosovo conflict was evidence of a deep crisis in the Yeltsin leadership, which, however, was unexceptional in Europe. The Kosovo events demonstrated a deep crisis not only of political leadership in the major European countries but also of European legal consciousness. Europeans have not yet realized what they did in Yugoslavia by supporting NATO’s air strikes against a European country and a European population.

It remains a riddle why Russia and European members of the Contact
Group accepted the Dayton model of negotiations in Rambouillet and Paris, as well as the implementation part of the interim agreement, which were at odds with European security interests. The former made the military intervention in Yugoslavia inevitable, the latter, if implemented, would have led to Kosovo’s secession. It is all the more strange because, from the very beginning of the Kosovo problem, the international community agreed on its regional aspect: it recognized that Kosovo’s secession would destroy the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) as an independent state and affect Greece. Consequently, this could lead to a bloody reshaping of the Southern Balkans. Russia did not put forward any workable initiative on the Kosovo problem, confining its role in Rambouillet and Paris to a purely mediatory mission in the narrowest sense. Just as during the first conflict in former Yugoslavia, Russia’s policy towards the Kosovo problem was low profile and declarative.

Everyone remembers that it was after Yeltsin’s resolute warning, ‘Russia will never permit Kosovo to be hurt’, that NATO started its bombing campaign and kept bombing for several months. Even worse, after the nomination of Victor Chernomyrdin as special presidential envoy on the Kosovo problem, Russia’s mediatory mission served as a smokescreen for NATO air strikes. Under its cover, NATO kept destroying Yugoslavia, calming the concerns of parliamentarians and public opinion in Europe with the very fact of Russia’s mediation and the ‘progress’ of Chernomyrdin’s mission. NATO’s satisfaction with Chernomyrdin’s mission was quite understandable. He did not put forward any conditions for Russia’s mediation, having reduced this role to that of a postman delivering messages from Western capitals to Belgrade and vice versa. No doubt, it would have been hard to find a better mediator for NATO. Chernomyrdin did not present any Russian plan on the Kosovo problem, even though a broad political consensus on Russia’s response existed among the political elite.

Thus it was recognized that the precondition for Russia’s mediation should be NATO’s moratorium on air strikes. The next step, as seen by Moscow, should be Belgrade’s decision to withdraw Yugoslav troops from Kosovo, to be synchronized with the deployment of peacekeeping forces under the auspices of the UN or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and with disarmament of the KLA guerrillas. For the Russian political elite, it was likewise obvious that NATO had lost the moral right to exercise such functions. Therefore, it would be necessary to think of the form and composition of the peacekeeping forces. Countries such as Russia and neutral countries that had not been involved directly in NATO’s bombing campaign could
satisfy both parties in the conflict. It also would be necessary to formulate the aims of the peacekeeping forces clearly, including their main task of policing. Their mandate should provide guarantees to former participants in the conflict for the observance of the impartiality principle. Proceeding from the experience of NATO and Russia in Bosnia, it would be essential to coordinate the legal base of peacekeeping to prevent differences in the interpretation of the corresponding mandate.

This position was gradually conceded by the Kremlin. First, no demand for a moratorium on air strikes was put forward as a precondition for Russia’s mediation. Second, in contrast to its initial position, the Kremlin agreed on the deployment in Kosovo not only of peacekeeping forces from NATO countries uninvolved directly in the bombing campaign but also of peacekeeping contingents of the US and its main allies, who were responsible for the military intervention. Having accepted NATO’s participation in Kosovo, the Kremlin strongly emphasized that the Russian contingent would be operating in Kosovo autonomously; it would be subordinate only to Moscow and have its own sector on equal terms with the US, Germany, France, the UK and Italy. President Boris Yeltsin made this statement in public in mid-June 1999 during Russian-American talks in Helsinki. Furthermore, Chernomyrdin promised Belgrade that the UN Security Council resolution would recognize Yugoslavia’s sovereignty over Kosovo and would be based not on Chapter VII (peace enforcement on one of the warring parties) but on Chapter VI (deployment of peacekeeping forces with the consent of all parties). As a result of these diplomatic activities, Belgrade was deceived on all points. The UN Security Council resolution 1244 has been based on Chapter VII, and Russia does not have its own sector (a compromise has been found in the vague wording of ‘zone’). A Russian contingent was deployed in four (of five) sectors of the NATO countries, and with the exception of the US sector, Russian battalions were surrounded by NATO troops. As for Russia’s operational independence from NATO in Kosovo, it is more symbolic than real. First, Kosovo Force (KFOR) contingents cannot perform their missions without coordination; however, the sector commands can take decisions regardless of the zone commands, but not the other way around. Second, it is clear that Russian peacekeepers can be easily blocked in their garrisons. In all probability, even this limited and subservient deployment would never have taken place if Russia had not deployed 200 paratroopers at the Slatina airport in Pristina only hours before NATO’s deployment.

So it is quite understandable why NATO and the Americans praised Chernomyrdin’s role and why Western emissaries who visit Moscow do their best to convince humble Russian politicians that Russia has played
a crucial role in the solution of the Kosovo crisis. The Russian political elite, however, has already recognized that Russia, for the second time in post-Cold War Balkan history, has failed in the region. Why did this happen if there existed a broad political consensus on the issue and a clear vision for Russia’s behaviour? The answer is simple: Russia’s foreign policy is guided by the Kremlin secluded group – ‘the family’ – and the personal interests and ambitions of its individual members. The power of the Kremlin coterie hinged on having the ear of President Yeltsin, whose physical state was far from perfect, and who was becoming more and more suspicious and jealous of his political rivals. Consequently, he was more dependent on ‘the family’. The nomination of Chernomyrdin as a special envoy on the Kosovo problem had nothing to do with Russia’s foreign policy. Least of all was Yeltsin thinking about Russia’s foreign policy interests and the Kosovo crisis. He wanted to show his dissatisfaction with Yevgeny Primakov’s activities not only in the field of foreign policy but in general, since Primakov did not fulfill his major mission of controlling the left’s opposition to the president in the State Duma. Yeltsin could not miss the opportunity to get rid of his political rival, who was regarded as a major candidate for the upcoming presidential elections. Furthermore, having chosen Chernomyrdin as a key figure to negotiate a peaceful settlement for Kosovo, President Yeltsin hoped to appease Washington, which, undoubtedly, preferred the loyal Chernomyrdin to Primakov. Finally, in the Kremlin’s calculations was the idea of introducing Chernomyrdin as a main candidate for the presidential elections if he succeeded in the Kosovo crisis. When, despite all the praise for Russia’s role, it became clear to everyone in Russia that Chernomyrdin’s mission had failed, President Yeltsin and ‘the family’ temporarily distanced themselves from their special envoy.

Russia’s position in Helsinki was also dependent on the personal ambitions of President Yeltsin. He wanted to go to the G-8 summit in Cologne with a trump card in his pocket. From this point of view, a Russian-American compromise on peacekeeping was badly needed in Helsinki, but Washington’s position on the terms of Russia’s participation in KFOR did not leave any room for manoeuvre. The march of 200 Russian paratroopers from Bosnia to Kosovo, a brilliant military operation, undoubtedly reinforced Russia’s positions in Helsinki, but the way it was presented by the Kremlin almost negated its importance. Instead of taking all responsibility for the operation, Yeltsin created the impression that he had nothing to do with the deployment of Russian peacekeepers at Slatina, which immediately raised Western concerns about Moscow’s unpredictability and the rule
of the military in Russia. It took the Kremlin several days to acknowledge that President Yeltsin had taken this decision himself. Preparing for the G-8 summit and in a rush, Yeltsin and ‘the family’ pressured the Russian delegation in Helsinki to precipitate the compromise. This resulted in Moscow’s concessions on the most important points. Russia did not get its own sector, which deprived Russian participation of its very raison d’être.

There exists an opinion, mostly among Russian liberal economists and Chubais-type politicians, that Russia, economically dependent on the West, cannot afford an independent foreign policy course. This position is tacitly shared by certain political forces in Europe and the US, which do not hesitate to use this dependence, confirming Russian Communists’ worst suspicions about the West. This inferiority complex is self-inflicted, because Russia’s current economic situation is a product of the joint efforts and common mistakes of Russia and the West (namely the Yeltsin administration and the major Western financial institutions). And although the primary responsibility for Russia’s economic failures rests with the Kremlin, these institutions, as well as some Western countries, share this responsibility. On several occasions, they openly intervened in Russia’s domestic clashes, siding with architects of an economic model that was discredited in Russia. So, it is necessary to distinguish between two different subjects: Russian debts and Russian foreign policy. All attempts to use Russia’s economic weakness will be counterproductive and affect the West itself. A low-profile foreign policy by Russia or self-imposed isolation in international relations would create a dangerous vacuum.

THE BALKANS AS A PIVOTAL REGION OF EUROPEAN SECURITY

The predominant trend in the Balkans is a NATOization of the region, a proliferation of nonviable states or protectorates that cannot exist without foreign military support. With the deployment of 25,000 NATO troops, 500,000 Albanian refugees and KLA guerrillas returned to Kosovo, which immediately became a microcosm of widespread violence driven by vengeful ethnic hatred. About 200,000 Serbs had to leave Kosovo because they could not rely on NATO’s protection, and Russia did not get its own sector, which could have served as a refuge for Serbs. The deployment of Russian peacekeepers was delayed (in all probability, deliberately) for different reasons, which increased the exodus of the non-Albanian population. Meanwhile, the KLA established administrative control. These developments are clear evidence that Kosovo is being gradually transformed into a monoethnic province.
After the end of its military campaign against Yugoslavia, NATO leadership declared it would be dealing with the civilian aspects of Kosovo’s transformation. The key issue, however, is whether NATO is capable of performing such a role.

First, NATO according to its concept and goals is a military alliance that encompasses only part of Europe. The situation both in Bosnia and in Kosovo, where NATO has become a hostage of its military missions in the absence of any clear-cut idea about the political outcome of peacekeeping and peace enforcement, casts doubt on NATO’s ability to lead a democratic transformation of the region.

Second, problems of ethno-religious separatism, which are fuelling most of the old conflicts as well as post-Communist tensions, are the most difficult to resolve. The deadlocked conflict between Greece and Turkey is revealing from this point of view. Another striking illustration may be the fact that for decades two NATO members, the developed democracies of Britain and Spain, have been unable to resolve similar problems on their own territories (to say nothing of Turkey, which can hardly be regarded as a democratic state, regardless of its membership in NATO). NATO is passively watching developments in Kosovo. The exodus of the non-Albanian population who fear revenge attacks by ethnic Albanians continues. There is a widespread opinion in Moscow that Washington has its own plan for Kosovo, one that has nothing to do with the UN Security Council resolution. If it were not so, why have KLA guerrillas not been disarmed in their camps in Albania? Why were they given three months for demilitarization? Why does the KFOR command close its eyes to atrocities against non-Albanians, tacitly encouraging them to leave the province? Why do the KLA field commanders have an upper hand in Kosovo, openly challenging Russian peacekeepers?

The predominant opinion of the Russian political elite is that Washington’s real goal was directed at eliminating the Milosevic regime at any cost, including the disintegration of the Yugoslav federation through secession of Montenegro. The Montenegro proposal for a loose two-state federation is a first step in this direction. If Montenegro secedes, nobody will be able to prevent Kosovo from secession through a referendum on independence, especially if it becomes a monoethnic province. Undoubtedly, these plans are fraught with new dangers and instability. The Montenegrin proposals posed a direct challenge to Milosevic. A member of Montenegro’s ruling coalition, Zarko Vukcevic, said, ‘The draft represents a major step toward a sovereign Montenegro ... because we are moving from the dead end called Yugoslavia.’ Milosevic would have been unlikely to accept the Montenegrin proposals which, by abolishing Yugoslavia, would have made his position
as Yugoslav president redundant. His ultranationalist ally, Vojislav Seselj, had already said that the Yugoslav army would intervene in Montenegro if it tried to secede, 'like the American army would if California tries to leave.' Once again, Europe might have become a hostage to American and NATO strategy, which was guided by paranoid hatred towards one man: Milosevic. This irresponsible strategy may ultimately result in regional destabilization, including a fragile peace in Bosnia, and expansion of violence to FYROM and other Balkan countries. In sum, NATO as it was conceived and structured is not suitable to perform post-Cold War missions.

As for Russia’s policy on Kosovo, Moscow is faced with a Hamlet-like dilemma. To stay in Kosovo as part of KFOR and legalize NATO’s previous actions in Yugoslavia by the very fact of Russia’s participation? Or to quit demonstratively and leave Serbs in Kosovo face-to-face with NATO, deprive them of any support and encourage their desperate resistance by any means? There is only one solution to this dilemma. Moscow should raise the possibility of revising the Helsinki military-technical agreement. Russia should insist on having its own sector in the northwestern part of Kosovo, which shares a border with Serbia. In such a case, the Russian contingent would not be dispersed and isolated, and non-Albanian refugees could find protection and support. In all probability Washington, which plays the main role in NATO, will be against the Russian sector under the pretext that it would mean a partition of Kosovo. In any case, this would be much better than the creation of a monoethnic province and its inevitable secession, which may trigger consequences far beyond Yugoslav territory.

Russia should rethink the terms of its participation in KFOR. It is clear that Moscow’s appeal to respect UN Security Council resolution 1244 will not impress Washington, which will try to use Russia’s economic dependence. But in spite of Russia’s limited diplomatic capabilities, there are still some resources to be used: arms control, including START-II, ratified by the State Duma, and negotiations on START-III; revision of the ABM treaty, which is very important to the US; control over the export of nuclear and chemical materials and equipment; and dual-use or sensitive technology. It is still possible to improve Russia’s position in the region and its relations with the US and NATO, not by subservient and unarticulated policy, but by constructive and sensible cooperation, which is of the utmost importance for future security arrangements in Europe.

In all probability, the European Union will become the main institution responsible for the democratic transformation of the Balkan region. The European Council at its Cologne Summit in June 1999 and
at the Stability Pact meeting in Sarajevo in July 1999 examined the perspective of the entire region’s full integration into the EU. This is supported by the peoples of the region, who understand that the Balkans as small protectionist states have no hope for a prosperous future.\(^6\)

However, all plans for stability and reconstruction, all good ideas, risk remaining no more than good intentions in the absence of two fundamental conditions: the inclusion of Yugoslavia in these plans and the participation of Russia in the region’s democratic transformation. Democratization and stabilization are impossible without massive investment in the region’s economic development; investment is impossible without stability; and stability is impossible without the inclusion of Yugoslavia. In the post-bipolar world, there is no alternative to an inclusive strategy by the international community. Democracy cannot flourish under air strikes. Neither can it flourish amid poverty and destruction.

As for Russia’s involvement, it is crucial not only for stability and security in the Balkans but also for the future of Russian-Western cooperation, which was deeply affected by the Kosovo crisis. Exclusion of Russia from the region’s democratic transformation will create new divisions in the Balkans and in Europe.

The failure of the Milosevic regime has opened new windows of opportunity for Yugoslavia’s democratic transformation and its inclusion in the plans of social and economic reconstruction of the region. President Kostunica was promised economic and financial aid by the international community, but it is unclear at what price. The new US administration, regardless of its criticism of Clinton’s foreign policy continues the same twisting course vis-a-vis President Kostunica. Having neglected all vulnerabilities of the new leadership in the post-Communist Yugoslavia, the Bush administration has conditioned its financial aid to Belgrade by the extradition of Slobodan Milosevic and Belgrade’s cooperation with the Hague Tribunal. This pressure cannot fail to weaken the position of President Kostunica, thus paving the way to nationalists and conservatives.

Another threat to the democratic transformation of Yugoslavia, and consequently to the stability of the region and of Europe, is emanating from Kosovo. The KFOR operation in Kosovo has demonstrated its inability to control the situation in the province which still boils with hatred. The remnants of the KLA and their supporters are being encouraged by NATO’s inaction. They are fearful that they will lose their last chance to achieve independence as a result of the new leadership in Belgrade. If they continue to target Serbian forces along the border and KFOR fails to stop them, NATO will again become involved in
unwanted hostilities at a time when Russian-Western relations are far from being perfect and when the US intends to reduce its presence in the Balkans. A primary goal of the international community should be to keep Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia together in order to prevent unlimited conflict.

WHAT NEXT?

The seeds of mistrust sown in Russia-NATO relations, as well as in Russian-American relations, are taking root both in Russia and in the West. The key question for European security is what should be done to retain the achievements of previous years, gained by the joint efforts of Russia and the West, and to stop the current slide toward new tensions detrimental to Russian democracy and European stability?

Since NATO has lost the chance to transform itself into a new security institution encompassing the whole of Europe, the only hope of retaining the achievements of the last decades (regardless of Russia’s grievances and disappointment with Europe during the Kosovo crisis) is a Russian-European dimension of Russian-Western relations. A certain phenomenon exists in Russian-European relations that can be defined as a reserve of durability. It is important to note that at no point did Russia-NATO differences during 1995 to 1997 affect EU-Russia dialogue at either the official or the public level, including bilateral relations with EU countries, even though most are NATO members.

In spite of all the current difficulties in Russian-Western relations, the fundamentals for EU-Russia cooperation are still sound. Having dissolved the USSR and consequently removed the threat of a global conflict, Russia has contributed more than other countries to the enhancement of European integration, including EU enlargement. The European Union is still Russia’s main trading partner and an important investor in Russia’s economy. EU countries account for 40 per cent of all Russian exports and 50 per cent of all foreign investment in Russia. With its tremendous human and natural resources, located mostly beyond the Urals, Russia could be indispensable for Europe’s future and, in particular, for the EU’s success in the twenty-first century competition with major economic groups such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum).

There are no sharp security interest conflicts between Russia and EU. On the contrary, Russia and Europe share common security and foreign policy interests related to the post-bipolar challenges of conflicts in the post-Communist space and the emergence of a new phenomenon, the Islamic dimension of European security.
Furthermore, Russia does not perceive the European Union/Western European Union (WEU) enlargement as a security threat (in contrast to NATO’s enlargement). Both Russia and the EU are interested in stimulating multipolarity in world politics. This should not be interpreted as meaning that the Russia-EU partnership might decouple the WEU from the United States. Nobody among Russia’s reasonable political forces doubts the necessity of the transatlantic link for European security, but that does not mean Russia and the EU/WEU cannot have a direct link as well. The issue of Europe’s operational possibilities in the event that the US refuses to get involved in a situation that might harm European interests is already topical. In this case, Russia’s potential in space reconnaissance and transport aviation (especially in the area of wide-bodied, ramp-fitted aircraft, such as Antonovs and Ilyushin Il-76s) could be of great use. Tactical ballistic missile defence might be another domain where there may be mutually beneficial interests in cooperating. Therefore, Russia’s cooperation with the WEU should be placed on a solid legal footing. From this point of view, it might be worthwhile also for the WEU to start thinking now about an interface for possible Russian participation in Petersberg missions and to come up with a NATO-type Memorandum of Understanding that provides a legal basis for the participation of non-WEU troops in operations.7

Some uncertainties and concerns exist in Europe about future developments in Russia. Regarding these concerns, two arguments are of utmost importance. First, one should not forget that in contrast to the USSR, which was created to oppose the West, Russia emerged on the international scene with its only desire to become part of the civilized world. Second, Russia’s evolution will depend not only on its domestic developments but also on the policy of the West, and above all, of the EU. It is extremely important that EU strategy towards Russia is based not just on good intentions and wishful thinking, like the NATO-Russia Founding Act, but also on concrete goals. Only this kind of partnership cannot be reversed.

With the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the Action Plan for Russia, the EU established a framework for its relationship with the Russian Federation that includes the security field. This is not enough to promote real partnership between Russia and the EU and consequently between Russia and the West. Unfortunately, the Strategy of the EU towards Russia, adopted in June 1999 in Cologne, as well as Russia’s Strategy on the European Union formulated in the fall of 1999, share one serious deficiency. Both lack strategic goals and thus risk remaining nothing more than a list of good intentions and nice words.
EUROPEAN SECURITY AFTER THE KOSOVO CRISIS

The goals of the Russian Strategy, as defined in the document, are:

the development and strengthening of strategic partnership between Russia and the EU in European and world affairs, and prevention and settlement, through common efforts, of local conflicts in Europe with an emphasis on supremacy of international law and non-use of force. It provides for a construction of a united Europe without dividing lines and the interrelated and balanced strengthening of the positions of Russia and the EU within an international community of the 21st century.⁸

One can hardly doubt the importance of the proclaimed goals; at the same time, it is obvious they are too vague to serve as a real guideline for Russia-EU partnership.

Thus, it will be extremely important to put forward more concrete objectives, such as Russia’s association with the EU when Russia meets all its standards. The concerns of major European states about uncertainties in Russia’s evolution are groundless. If Russia fails to meet EU criteria, the very question of its association with the EU will be irrelevant. If Russia succeeds in building a prosperous and democratic country compatible with EU requirements, there will be no visible reason for concern.

Of course, many unresolved problems remain between the EU and Russia, including favourable conditions for access by Russian goods and services to EU markets and the problem of recognition of the market status of Russia’s economy.⁹ But most of these problems can be overcome if Russia is regarded by the EU as a real partner, or better still, a strategic partner. Paradoxically, the only practical form of cooperation between Russia and the West in Europe is the joint peacekeeping in Bosnia and in Kosovo (however symbolic and limited it may be).

With Yeltsin’s resignation and Putin’s election to the presidency, Russian foreign policy has entered a new stage. Moscow has shown a propensity to pursue a two-track policy. One track has consisted of continuing pragmatic cooperation with the West and its main institutions to diminish the damage of the negative trends for Russia in the international environment. The second track involves tougher positions on arms control, security and defence issues. The balance between these two approaches is to shape Russia’s policy toward NATO and the West in general. But in the absence of any serious intentions on the part of the West to rethink the terms of its relations with Russia, the second approach may acquire its own dynamics and, if not stopped, result in a new version of the Soviet ‘foot-in-the-door policy’, with all the predictable consequences.
The reserve of durability that exists in Russian-European relations will not last forever, and it would be naive to rely only on this phenomenon. Both Russia and the West have already lost many opportunities following the end of bipolarity, and it would be unforgivable if Russia and the EU lost this last chance.

NOTES

3. Layne and Schwarz (2000, 6).
5. Ibid.