
The EU and Russia: The Needed Balance Between Geopolitics and Regionalism



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Russie.Nei.Visions

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In collaboration with its partners, Ifri is currently supporting a task force on the future of EU-Russia relations. The first workshop was held on 2 December 2005 in Paris. Four original contributions were then presented: by Andrew Monaghan (security), Thomas Gomart (neighborhood policy), Timofei Bordachev (lobbying), and Michael Thumann (energy). They were debated by Xavier de Villepin, Louis Gautier, Dov Lynch, and Dominique David. The workshop was chaired by Thierry de Montbrial.

This special issue of *Russie.Nei.Visions* gathers all these contributions in one place. At this stage, they must be read as works in progress, intended for critique and thus as fuel for the EU-Russia debate. They will be further enriched through the work of the second workshop, in 2006, and will end by issuing precise recommendations.

The four contributors would like to thank and acknowledge all the participants for their active contribution to this project.

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Abstract

While the EU conceives its neighborhood via regional policies, Russia sees it in terms of geopolitics. A large part of the misunderstanding which prevails on both sides concerning the “Common Space for External Security” stems from the clash between these different mental maps. By examining the respective and reciprocal implications of these approaches, this paper underlines the need for both parties to become conscious of the conceptual gap between their viewpoints, and to try ultimately reducing it.

Introduction

Between Brussels and Moscow, the double enlargement of NATO and the EU in May 2004 was essentially unprepared. By admitting ten new members (eight of which came from Central and Eastern Europe), the EU has not only changed its own identity and domestic way of working, but also regional balances of power, politics of control over energy transit, differential impacts of land size, and positions on foreign policy.

Within the EU/Russia framework, it is often said that the “common space” dedicated to external security is the most tricky to handle. Officially, it is aimed at strengthening and developing EU-Russia dialogue and cooperation in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in Europe and beyond. Unofficially, the Common Space on External Security seems to be a field of geopolitical rivalry. This is mainly due to an unprecedented overlapping of two peripheries within the former Soviet area and a clear lack of mutual confidence. Just a brief example: in November 2004, events in Ukraine were an ellipsis during the EU/Russia summit in The Hague. Added to this, there is a clear feeling in Moscow that they are retreating, in contrast to the EU which is expanding. Both sides simply do not share the same core objectives for their common neighborhood. The EU above all intends to stabilize its periphery whereas Russia wants to maintain its ability to control developments in the area seen as its vital periphery. This new geographic situation has consequently raised “a range of border questions”.¹

In this regard, the Common Space on External Security seems to be a rather limited implement. In this Space during the last EU-Russia summit, the EU briefed Moscow on EU plans for the border assistance mission in Moldova and expressed concerns about this situation in Belarus (in anticipation of the elections of March 2006) and in Uzbekistan (after the massacre in Andjian). It is also worth noting that the EU sanctions against Tashkent were implemented just before the Summit. In London, the participants also welcomed the positively developing dialogue and cooperation on terrorism and crisis management.² In spite of this positive official statement, there are differing political attitudes between the EU and Russia.

There is no doubt that the EU enlargement was in fact the latest dramatic change between the EU and Russia and that both sides were not prepared for the enlargement. Consequently, the new proximity between

¹ D. Lynch, “From ‘Frontier’ Politics to ‘Border’ Policies Between the EU and Russia” in Antonenko and K. Pinnick, *Russia and the European Union*, London, Routledge/IISS, 2005, p. 16.

² 16th EU-Russia Summit, London 4 October 2005, Press Release, UK Presidency of the EU.

the EU and Russia has to be addressed. Irrespective of its potential for instability, there is a real lack of appropriate intellectual tools to think jointly about the way of engaging the common neighborhood. Obviously, following the enlargement, the geopolitical pivot of the EU has shifted eastwards. ENP (European Neighborhood Policy) was the main overall/regional instrument used to deal with this dramatic geopolitical change. Russian officials refused to be covered by ENP, believing it was insulting to be included in the same group with countries such as Morocco or Libya. Instead of preparing for EU enlargement in terms of regional policies, Moscow focused on the NATO enlargement seen as having the most decisive geopolitical impact. Unsurprisingly, Moscow mobilized much more political resources against NATO enlargement than against EU enlargement, which was mainly dealt with from a technical point of view (access for Russian citizens to the Kaliningrad *oblast* and the visa regime).³ Paradoxically, NATO/Russia mechanisms are sometimes promoted as an example for the EU/Russia dialogue. It is also worth noting that, comparatively speaking, the frontier with the EU is Russia's most stable one (in particular those in Central Asia and the Far East). In other words, the proximity with the EU is probably not the main geopolitical concern facing Russia nowadays, as compared, for instance, to a Chinese, Indian, or Iranian emergence, or to the power struggle in Central Asia. From this point of view, it should be of high interest to include the EU in a regional policy rather than in a systematic geopolitical approach.

When Russian and European experts deal with the shared neighborhood, they have consistently advocated the same thing: abandoning zero-sum thinking and focusing on win-win solutions instead. Unfortunately, this alternative is merely a slogan, only used to avoid disagreement over neighbors without reaching any actual agreement on the neighborhood. Adopting a policy oriented approach certainly implies overcoming this alternative. Both sides should pay special attention to the appropriate ways of mixing geopolitics and regionalism. That means the EU should understand why and how Russia is thinking in geopolitical terms, whereas Russia should pay more attention to the EU project by accepting the consequences of supranationality and regionalism. It is probably the only way to find common ground in order to address territorial issues.

³ T. Bordachev, "Russia's European Problem: Eastward Enlargement of the EU and Moscow's Policy, 1993-2003" in O. Antonenko and K. Pinnick, *op. cit.*, p. 51-52.

1) This paper is based on the following observation: the EU is probably too obsessed by regionalism to the detriment of geopolitics. On the contrary, Russia is possibly too obsessed by geopolitics, to the detriment of regionalism. Their respective obsessions are definitely sources of misunderstanding.

2) In that case, it is crucial that both sides find out the proper combination between regionalism and geopolitics in order to think their common neighborhood with common intellectual tools and appropriate scales. It is pure non-sense, for instance, to address Ukraine and Moldova with a similar rhetoric. There is a political need for a system of territorial prioritization.

3) This task implies a real attempt to define some common territorial conceptions. The discussion here does not intend to go into theoretical issues in any great depth but rather to clarify a set of basic notions.

3-1) Geopolitics.⁴ For many reasons, students and experts of the EU have neglected geopolitics for too long.⁵ The EU cannot avoid the geopolitical implications of integration and enlargement for two main reasons. First, because of its formidable concentration of wealth as well as its territorial peaceful extension, the EU cannot avoid being political in its use and implications. Second, the EU is perceived as a major geopolitical entity by its neighbors, and especially by Russia. Conversely, it is no longer sufficient for Russia to act as a global power to have a hold on its European neighborhood. Especially considering that the EU acts less in terms of territory and more in terms of governance and integration

3-2) Regionalism, Inter-regionalism, and Sub-regionalism. Paradoxically, the study of regionalism and inter-regionalism is underrepresented in the European academic debate,⁶ whereas the EU's main foreign activities are based on regional policies. Regionalism can be defined as institutionalized cooperation (whether through the formal framework of a regional organization or not) among geographically proximate countries. Inter-regionalism can be defined as the relationships between regional (and/or sub-regional) groupings. Sub-regionalism can be defined as the development of sub-regional institutionalized cooperation, specifically among fewer countries. It can arise from within and/or be encouraged by outsiders.⁷

⁴ For a French view of geopolitical thought, see Th. de Montbrial, *Géographie politique*, Paris, PUF, coll. QSJ ?, 2006, p. 20-21. Defined as "the domain of ideologies relating to territory", geopolitics includes an "eminently psychological factor in the widest sense of the term" insofar as it rests on "reciprocal images", or clichés, which engender a perception of the other often "based on very incomplete information". Y. Lacoste, *Géopolitique, La longue histoire d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Larousse, 2006, p. 8, the term geopolitics refers to "the rivalry of power and influence on territories and their populations".

⁵ C. Hill, "The Geopolitical Implications of Enlargement" in J. Zielonka (ed.), *Europe Unbound*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 98.

⁶ F. Söderbaum & L. Van Langenhove, "Introduction: The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism", *European Integration*, No 3, 2005, p. 251.

⁷ Definitions are taken from: K. Smith, "The EU and Central and Eastern Europe: The Absence of Interregionalism", *European Integration*, No 3, 2005, p. 348-349.

Should the EU Instill Some Geopolitics in ENP?

Ability and Inability to Point Out Different Levels of External Action

Within its eastern neighborhood, the EU faces a tremendous strategic challenge: filling up the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Soviet power. Globally speaking, the EU is pursuing two key objectives. The first is ensuring peace between its state members. The second is providing “the conditions for geopolitical stability built on the foundations of a commitment to liberal democracy”.⁸ Undoubtedly, the future of the European project is very much linked to the success or failure of the EU’s engagement with countries, regions, and sub-regions in its immediate neighborhood. Irrespective of its domestic situation, the EU faces at the moment three basic strategic options to deal with its periphery. The first one is stabilization. In this view, the EU primitive objective consists only of avoiding conflicts and territorial clashes. The second option is europeanization. In this view, the EU intends to promote its norms and values without offering membership to concerned countries. The third option is integration consisting in membership after an accession process. In that case, timing is obviously one of the strategic keys.

At the moment, ENP could probably be related to the second option. After the double negative votes in France and in the Netherlands, reconsidering the process of enlargement is a top priority. To fill in the growing gap between the European élite and national realities, enlargement should no longer be handled as an administrative process based mainly on regional tools out of political control. Geopolitics is required for two main reasons, even if the EU is not used to thinking in geopolitical terms.⁹ First, the EU will be unworkable without clear boundaries, but because of divergent interests and mental maps, member states lack any consensus on the EU’s eastern and southeastern

⁸ R. Danreuther, “Setting the Framework” in R. Danreuther (ed.), *European Union Foreign and Security Policies*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 1-2.

⁹ M. Lefebvre, « Un programme géopolitique pour l’Europe élargie », *Politique étrangère*, n° 3-4, 2003, p. 718.

frontiers.¹⁰ Second, the EU should clearly define the different levels of its external action. Speaking all the time about neighborhood is the better way to thicken the territorial fog. That is why a political effort for geopolitical clarification is certainly expected on the regional, sub-regional, and bilateral levels.

There exists a fundamental divergence between member states—contingent on their respective interests—about the importance to attach to the oriental and southern neighborhood or to individual countries within these neighborhoods. It is likely that once again this issue will be raised in an administrative way prior to a political one during the next debate on the ENPI (European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument). On the sub-regional level, it is worth pondering the relevance of grouping some countries,¹¹ or of building up some sub-regional dimensions such as the former Northern dimension. It is also worth thinking about how to engage Russia in such issues. At the bilateral level, the EU should also be able to list territorial priorities in order to increase its impact at the local level.

A Tricky Combination Between the ENP and the EU/Russia Strategic Partnership

The main problem is to find out the proper combination between the four spaces and ENP, which can be seen as a soft policy tool. One of the main difficulties encountered by the EU lies in the relationship between its policies toward Russia and those toward the East European states (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova). Essentially, the EU has not managed to clearly define Russia's position in its Eastern policy and is still hesitating between a specific strategy, as demanded by Moscow, and a global strategy, advocated in particular by the new members, in order to limit Moscow's influence on the EU and the CIS countries. Officially, according to their respective constitutions, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova are all neutral countries. In fact, Ukraine and Moldova have both declared their political objective to join the EU, whereas Belarus is continuing its process of isolation from Western institutions. Moscow regards the western CIS countries crucial for economic reasons as well as for security reasons. In the security field, the three countries could, after NATO/EU's enlargements, be seen as a "gap" of more than 60 million people between

¹⁰ W. Wallace, "Where Does Europe End?" in J. Zielonka (ed.), *Europe Unbound*, *op. cit.*, p. 78-79.

¹¹ There are many possible combinations for this. For example: (a) Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine for being European parts of the former Soviet Union; (b) Georgia in addition to the former countries; (c) Caucasus countries including Georgia; (d) Georgia and Ukraine because of recent domestic evolution and joint objective "to promote democracy".

the spheres of Russia in the east and an expanding NATO and EU in the west.¹²

Concerning Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, the inconsistencies and limitations of the EU's strategic engagement over the last decade should be underlined. The three countries have never been considered top priorities due to their specific relations with Moscow. Indeed, in the early 1990s the underlying assumption of the EU policy towards the three countries was based on the expectation that they would group around Russia within the CIS.¹³ With this assumption in mind, the EU urged that close economic links between Russia and these countries be maintained. This approach has remained the basis of EU policy towards these countries. Undoubtedly, the accession of new members such as Poland or the Baltic states followed by the events in Ukraine, have definitely shook the basis for this assumption. At the same time, despite regular summits and positive public statements, relations between the EU and Russia have not been improved. The disparity between their mechanisms and substance has certainly increased: the permanent dialogue does not necessarily reveal a joint project.¹⁴ It seems rather that the friction between interests and values has been revived by new spatial proximity, inequalities of development, and conceptual differences.

It is one thing to say that the EU and Russia are developing a "strategic partnership" separated from the ENP. It is another to mobilize specific financial resources to feed the EU/Russia relationship. In fact, financial support for ENP partner countries will be provided through a single instrument, the ENPI. From 2007, it will replace existing geographical and thematic programs covering the countries concerned.¹⁵ The current period (2004-2006) is covered by some specific arrangements, the so-called "Neighborhood Programs" aimed at addressing the opportunities and challenges arising from enlargement through strengthened cooperation at the cross-border and regional level. They are also aimed at facilitating the legal flow of people, goods and services across the Union's external borders.¹⁶ From 2007 to 2013, the ENPI is expected to allocate 14.929 million Euros. The ENPI would represent just over 15 per cent of spending on external action (a proposed figure of 95.590 million Euros).¹⁷ In 2004, the budget for Mediterranean and East European countries accounted for 1.420 million Euros with 467 million

¹² J. Hedenskog, "Filling 'the Gap', Russian Security Policy Towards Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Under Putin" in J. Hedenskog, *et al.*, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

¹³ A. Zagorski, "Policies Towards Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus" in R. Danreuther (ed.), *European Union Foreign and Security Policies*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁴ C. Bayou, « Le dialogue russo-européen sert-il un projet ? », *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, n° 3, 2005, p. 71-107.

¹⁵ Proposal presented by the Commission: "Laying Down General Provisions Establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument", COM(2004) 628 final, 29/09/2004.

¹⁶ "Tacis Cross-Border Cooperation: Strategy Paper and Indicative Programme 2004-2006", adopted by the European Commission, 21/11/2003.

¹⁷ The external action budget accounts for less than 10 percent of the EU's overall budget.

Euros for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, and 953 million Euros for the Middle East and the South Mediterranean.¹⁸

According to the EU Commission, the strategic partnership with Russia will be developed through the four common spaces “consistent with the ENP”, which will also lead to increase cross-border and regional cooperation. The cooperation with Russia will be supported financially through the ENPI. More precisely, the Commission recommends that Russia be offered support for implementing relevant parts of the strategic partnership from the proposed ENPI.¹⁹ Many conclusions should be drawn from the Commission’s orientations, both in political and practical terms. First, the special political status always required by Moscow will be more and more rhetorical if, in practice, the strategic partnership is supported by the ENPI. Second, Russia will implicitly be included in a sort of fund competition. Though it intends to be funded by the EU, Russia has to compete with the ENP partners. Third, the emerging overlap between ENP and the strategic partnership can be understood as an attempt of financial rationalization. At the same time, it is also related to the institutional changes possibly expected through the Constitutional Treaty. Fourth, concerning the EU attitude toward its main neighbors, it will be highly significant to note the meaning of “strategic partner” in accordance with future financial arrangements. In other words, should the EU translate “strategic” into financial assistance and if so, how? Fifth, both Russia and ENP partners are supposed to increase cross-border and regional cooperation with the EU.

A No Man’s Land Between Regionalism and Bilateralism

ENP is in fact based on a combination of regional and bilateral approaches. Operating through the existing contractual relations, it is supposed to bring added value both to partner countries and to the EU by enhancing partnership and bringing it closer to EU values. Indeed, ENP is primarily an attempt to create good neighbors conforming to EU standards and laws. It is also an attempt to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines. The regional dimension is expressed in the perspective of moving towards a significant degree of integration, which includes, for partner countries, a stake in the EU’s Internal Market. The bilateral dimension is based on the differentiation between partners so as to enhance cooperation in accordance with the respective needs and abilities of the individual partner countries. Action Plans are the main operational tools used to set up a bilateral relation between the EU and the concerned country. An Action Plan lists targets in various fields (political, security,

¹⁸ Figures from K. Smith, “The Outsiders: The European Neighborhood Policy”, *International Affairs*, No 4, 2005, p. 767.

¹⁹ <www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/faq_en.htm> / Frequently Asked Questions about the ENP.

economic, commercial, environmental, scientific, and cultural). Its implementation is supported with financial and technical EU assistance.

ENP is clearly lacking geopolitical concerns. By avoiding any kind of territorial limitations, ENP is not a policy dedicated to defining and supporting the EU neighborhood, but an instrument increasingly used for international cooperation. In the near future, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon will be covered by ENP, and there is absolutely no reason to stop the process, however. Concerning the bilateral approach through Action Plans, it is rather difficult at this stage to speculate on their efficiency. Nevertheless, their political orientation is clearly prominent. Action Plans list a set of political objectives related to the promotion of democracy, more particularly with the Mediterranean neighbors. Added to this, it seems that the Actions Plans “reflect a rather ample dose of EU self-interest”.²⁰ Indeed, the EU insists on concluding readmission agreements with the ENP partners (as well as with Russia). In a sense, Action Plans can be seen as a creeping geopolitical approach. By favoring bilateralism, the EU is always in a force position to promote its interests. By requiring readmission agreements as one of the main conditions for developing the partnership, the EU is indirectly delimiting the frontiers of its neighborhood.

According to Karen Smith, ‘bilateralism is clearly predominant over regionalism’²¹ within ENP. Consequently, there is a real absence of inter-regionalism in Europe. Paradoxically, EU enlargement has possibly increased this tendency. The EU’s East European policy differentiates much more between individual countries than it has in the last decade.²² At the same time, ENP officially intends to reinforce existing forms of regional and sub-regional cooperation, and provide a framework for their further development. The EU is not seeking to set up new bodies or organizations but rather to support existing entities. Concerning Eastern Europe, it intends to involve Russia as a partner in regional cooperation. The Council of Europe, the Baltic Sea Council, the Central European Initiative, and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation are recognized as having an important part to play to this end.²³ In contrast, neither the CIS nor the SES are mentioned in EU official documents.²⁴

There is a huge political contradiction in the EU’s attitude towards its Eastern neighborhood. On the one hand, the EU encourages regional cooperation all over the world and promotes itself as a successful example of this. On the other hand, the EU has never lent support to regional cooperation among the former Soviet republics, in particular within the context of the CIS. This position can be explained mainly by geopolitical concerns. Indeed, signing an agreement with the CIS or a sub-group within it would legitimize and strengthen Russian control on its near abroad. That

²⁰ K. Smith, “The Outsiders: The European Neighborhood Policy”, art. cit., p. 765.

²¹ K. Smith, “The EU and Central and Eastern Europe: The Absence of Interregionalism”, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

²² A. Zagorski, “Policies Towards Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus”, art. cit., p. 93.

²³ <www.europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/faq_en.htm> / Frequently Asked Questions about ENP.

²⁴ Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Single Economic Space (SES)—the project of economic integration between Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan launched in September 2003.

is why the Commission noted clearly that the former Soviet republics “cannot be treated as a monolithic bloc” even if they are facing common challenges.²⁵ From a Georgian, Moldavian, or Ukrainian point of view, this position is perfectly understandable—it is even desirable. However, the real problem is engaging Russia into sub-regional cooperation, to avoid its isolation and/or power to disturb. Undoubtedly, the “strategic partnership” between the EU and Russia, often perceived as working over the heads of concerned countries such as Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, is not appropriate for addressing regional issues.

Recommendation 1: the EU should clarify its principled position towards subregional integration projects within the former Soviet space.

Recommendation 2: the EU should find out a better combination between its regional and bilateral approaches. A sub-regional level is certainly required to act more efficiently, and also to get a better geopolitical understanding. Regional dimensions such as the Northern one deserve to be explored.

Recommendation 3: the EU should not conduct its policies towards Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia separately from its Russian one, but alongside it. At the same time, it should insist on the absolute necessity to resolve the so-called “frozen conflicts”.

Recommendation 4: the EU should use the implementation of the ENPI to address overall thinking about its “strategic partnership” with Russia. More practically speaking, the debate has been opened over the financial allocation within the framework of the ENPI. Both sides should start preparing new cross-border projects to express their readiness for establishing joint opportunities.

²⁵ European Commission, “TACIS Regional Cooperation: Strategic Considerations 2002-2006 and Indicative Program 2002-2003”, 27/12/2001.

Should Russia Instill Some Regionalism in the So-Called “Near Abroad”?

A Reactive European Policy

Nowadays, most Russian experts consider that Europe is the best natural partner for their country due to the shared cultural traditions, as well as the tendency of the Russian people to embrace a European self-identification. Of Russia's many international partners, relations with the EU hold a unique place.²⁶ This feeling is definitely shared by the business community but only partly by the political one. It was often alleged that Vladimir Putin launched a pro-European policy when he arrived in the Kremlin in 2000. During his first term, the logic of europeanization for Russia seemed rather clear, even if the Russian president always insisted on Russian “specificity”, i.e., the existence of a special development path for his country. Not surprisingly, Putin had to cope with the traditional Russian dilemma—how to europeanize without losing its national identity. Indeed, the practical implementation of the European choice implies the recognition of long-established rules as well as the assimilation of common values. Because of its historical background and its expressed intentions to still be considered a great power, it is highly unlikely that Russia will undergo the integration process (nobody in either Moscow or Brussels has seriously entertained the idea of future Russian membership in the EU). Generally speaking, Russian elites consider that following such a path would damage Russia's immediate interests by rapidly decreasing its influence in the immediate region. Simply put, Moscow has no intention of managing its internal development and its external actions based on the imperatives of the “*acquis communautaire*” or the moral principles promoted by the EU.

This position is well known in the different European circles. Nevertheless, there is certainly a misunderstanding of the Russian geopolitical attitude on the part of the EU. The EU considers its enlargement and the NATO enlargement as two separate processes. It

²⁶ S. Karaganov, *et al.*, “Russia's European Strategy: A New Start”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, No 3, 2005.

seems perfectly understandable that some Russian elites perceive those two enlargements jointly, insofar as some new members joined NATO specifically to get some security guarantees vis-à-vis a resurgent Russian threat. In the security field, the EU has not yet obtained NATO's level of credibility in the Russian point of view: the Kremlin considers that NATO is the only serious security organization on the European continent, and consequently a way should be found to interact effectively with it. In regards to the Russian side, it is worth bearing in mind that there is still a mix of a physical threat and an abstract idea of geopolitical disadvantage in Moscow's positions towards the two enlargements.

More broadly, many Russian positions stem from a geopolitical mindset largely shared by the different elites: "military power, territorial issues, threat perceptions, and notions of strategic balance have assumed a prominence unmatched anywhere else on the planet".²⁷ From this point of view, it is probably a mistake for the EU (coming from a sort of soft dogmatism for avoiding the geopolitical approach, which implies frontiers definition) to rule out this dimension in negotiating with the Russians. Russia is a state essentially thinking in terms of sovereignty and territorial integrity. By focusing on security as well as on economic issues, Putin has deeply contributed to a reduction in dogmatism on traditional geopolitics. The improvement of the relations between NATO and Russia is certainly one of Putin's main achievements in terms of foreign policy. Despite the strong resistance from the military, Putin succeeded in changing the atmosphere surrounding the alliance, so that it is no longer seen in a permanent adversarial light.²⁸ Obviously, this does not imply the end of a geopolitical mindset, but suggests dealing with the triangle Russia/NATO/EU²⁹ more systematically. In any case, the EU should keep in mind that the Russian territorial approach is still very far from regionalism in its European meaning, but deeply influenced by geopolitics. Therefore, the challenge is to find a balance between regionalism and geopolitics.

Going beyond Geopolitics

Putin's policy during his first term was based on a balance between security and economic concerns.³⁰ His policy was aimed at promoting Russia's economic development and in creating a "multi-vector" diplomatic stance so as to become a highly sought after partner on the international scene. His most ambitious integration project was located in the western

²⁷ B. Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy*, London, Blackwell Publishing/RIIA, 2003, p. 72. The whole chapter 5 is of great interest to have a better understanding of this geopolitical mindset.

²⁸ J. Godzimirski, "Russia and NATO, Community of Values or Community of Interests" in Hedenskog, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 57-80.

²⁹ See the article of A. Monaghan in this issue.

³⁰ T. Gomart, « Vladimir Poutine ou les avatars de la politique étrangère russe », *Politique étrangère*, n° 3-4, 2003, p. 795.

part of the CIS through the SES previously mentioned. It could be seen as an attempt to build up an autonomous zone possibly competing with the EU, with the purpose of creating two European centers.³¹ Signed in September 2003, the SES entered into force in May 2004; the four countries represent approximately 90% of the GDP of the CIS as a whole.³² The Commission's reaction was not positive at all; it called for prudence, questioning the compatibility between this zone and the 'common space' devoted to economic relations, which the EU and Russia are still trying to create.³³ This zone, for which the prospect of a common currency project has been raised, offers geopolitical rather than economic value (none of its members belong to the WTO). Serious doubts exist concerning its viability but it is indicative of the state of mind prevailing in Moscow, i.e., an approach in its relations with the EU that is above all geopolitical. Obviously, the events in Ukraine seriously damaged the project but certainly did not call the geopolitical mindset into question.

In the last few years, Russia has been engaged in capital expansion, especially within the CIS, but also within the EU, and with special attention to new members. It is an expression of its revival as well as of the evolution of the elite's mindset: business has acquired some autonomy and intends to participate in globalization. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of Russian private capital cannot be disconnected from state support, in particular strategic fields such as energy or aeronautics. Thanks to oil revenue, it is possible to complement the traditional means of influence with a range of investment capacities used differently according to the CIS country in question.³⁴ The Russian strategic view on the CIS is based on three main principles. First, the Russian capital can be used to obtain economic assets in different countries. Second, the diversified political influence should be used to systematically defend Russian security interests. Third, soft power action consists in creating a sort of common cultural space based on the Russian language.³⁵ The EU should take into consideration the dominant Russian position in the information space (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and books) in the CIS countries.³⁶

Despite the range of means at its disposal within CIS countries, Russia seems to be losing its influence, or more precisely its attractiveness. Some analysts consider that the post-Soviet space threatens to evolve into a sort of "intermediate Europe", given the fact that Russia is no longer seen as a pole of political and economic dynamism.³⁷

³¹ T. Gomart, "Enlargement Tests the Partnership Between The EU & Russia", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³² F. Cameron and J. Domanski, "Russian Foreign Policy with Special Reference to its Western Neighbours", *EPC Issue Paper*, No 37, July 2005, p. 7.

³³ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on relations with Russia, COM (2004) 106, 09/02/2004.

³⁴ I. Kobrinskaya, "The Multispeed Commonwealth", *Russia in Global Affairs*, No 1, 2004.

³⁵ D. Trenin, "Identichnost' i integraciâ: Rossiâ i Zapad v XXI veke" [Identité et intégration : la Russie et l'Occident au XXI siècle], *Pro et Contra*, No 3, 2004, p. 16.

³⁶ J. Hedenskog, "Filling 'the Gap', Russian Security Policy Towards Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Under Putin » in J. Hedenskog, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

³⁷ A. Moshes, "Reaffirming the Benefits of Russia's European Choice", *Russia in Global Affairs*, No 3, 2005.

Seeking more or less a broader economic base, the Russian authorities did not succeed in moving away from their traditional reliance on energy income. At the same time, the EU was seen as a zone of democratic stability and economic prosperity. Over the past few years, western CIS countries began to realize they had a choice between two types of organization, in so far as Russia renounced using its military capabilities. This renouncing is one of the lessons not sufficiently drawn from the recent events within the CIS countries. The next step for Russia, and particularly for its military, is to understand that its direct or indirect participation in “frozen conflicts” are among the biggest stumbling blocks for its own development.

Lack of Regionalism and Failure of Cross-border Cooperation

There have been many attempts among Russian experts to work out new formats of regional integration. Some of them consider that the CIS has a future as a regional community, even if its prestige is in steady decline, even though other experts argue that the CIS is an organization kept alive largely through personal contacts between leaders. The latest CIS summit took place in Kazan at the end of August 2005. Even though the modernization of the organization is still a Russian aim, Putin openly recognized its dysfunctional nature. The Russian President advocated the creation of a group of “wise men” to develop ideas for the reorganization of the CIS. The Russian authorities officially intend to change their relations with former Soviet Republics. In Kazan, Yushchenko declared that his country would not withdraw from the SES provided that such participation did not contradict Ukraine’s objective of joining the EU. At the same time, Ukraine declined to sign any agreements involving the possible establishment of “supra-national” mechanisms. Recently, the Russian authorities insisted on the necessity to establish acceptable rules of the game in the post-Soviet space in accordance with their main partners (the US and the EU). Significantly, these attempts occurred when “the loosely organized bloc appears to be splitting into two distinct camps”.³⁸ On the one hand, one grouping is ready to stay within Russia’s geopolitical orbit (mainly Belarus, and Kazakhstan). On the other hand, there is a pro-Western grouping seeking to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures (mainly Ukraine and Georgia). There is no doubt that the Borjomi declaration for a Commonwealth of Democratic Choice led by Yushchenko and Saakashvili was perceived by Moscow to be a turning point in terms of influence-seeking. The debate on the relevance of the CIS as an organization corresponding with current geopolitical realities is once again open.

³⁸ I. Torbakov, Kremlin wants to set parameters on Western interests in CIS states », *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Issue 168, 12 September, 2005.

At the same time, some Russian experts insist on the need for a CIS revival in order to avoid uncertainty in the region. Arguing that neither the EU nor the US will be able to impose their system of governance in the CIS territory, some of them present Russia as the only possible force of integration.³⁹ Russia is supposed to be the provider of new ideas in the CIS, which implies a change in attitude towards former Soviet republics and a desire for consensus with countries perceived as associates. In the current situation, the question of limiting instability between the EU and Russia by avoiding the disintegration of the CIS is highly relevant. Requiring the creation of an EU-CIS framework might establish certain protocol, but could also contribute fuel to inter-regionalism.⁴⁰

Despite the attempts to renew and reshape the post-Soviet space, it is worth insisting on the overall deficiency of regional integration within it. In fact, the different groupings are much more focused on political and military-strategic interests than on economic and commercial integration. It seems that Russia's attempt to restore a common economic space by integration with CIS members means the setting up of a preferential regional regime with a geopolitical background.⁴¹ To put things bluntly, a real regional cooperation within CIS groupings has not yet started. This is mainly due to Russia's trade turnover with the CIS member countries: it has fallen from US\$ 138.1 billion in 1991 to US\$ 25.8 billion in 2002, that is, by more than four-fifths.⁴² It is crucial to note that the recommendations made by an expert panel on this topic emphasize the need of a preliminary scientific working preparation. In order to deal with the problems of a normative legal character, experts are recommending conferences aimed at preparing materials which could be sent to the different authorities.⁴³ Undoubtedly, the know-how of integration is actually coming late to the unification process of the CIS.

Recommendation 5: Russia should promote a much more positive policy towards the CIS countries in order to improve its attractiveness. This implies a resolution to end the "frozen conflicts" by accepting the idea that these conflicts are keeping Russia with an unproductive post-imperial attitude.

Recommendation 6: Russia should make better use of its sphere of information in order to promote a much more positive image of itself. As one of the UN's official languages, Russian should be more promoted. Conversely, the EU should pay special attention to Russian soft power. Consequently, the EU will get a better understanding of the evolution within "intermediate Europe."

³⁹ O. Butorina, "Change or Die", *Russia in Global Affairs*, No 3, 2005.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ A. Kupriianov, "Globalization and International Transregional Cooperation Between Post-Soviet Countries", *Problems of Economic Transition*, No 12, 2005, p. 33-34.

⁴² V. Vashanov, "Problems of Interregional Cooperation Between Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States", *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴³ Recommendations of the International Scientific Conference on "Regional Cooperation Between Russia and the CIS" (Moscow, 20-21 May, 2004), *ibid.*, p. 114-116.

Recommendation 7: because of the Ukraine's evolution, Russia—in accordance with concerned countries—should prepare a new version of the SES, or another flexible grouping, insisting on the necessity to achieve practical arrangements. The EU would be associated from the start in order to build mutual confidence. The same should be done for initiatives coming from some other CIS member countries. It is also highly important to narrowly conceive economic integration and political liberalization in order to avoid new psychological, and consequently practical, frontiers. The future of the CIS should also be seen as a subject of concern for the EU.

Recommendation 8: Russia should develop a better know-how on cross-border cooperation, defined as a more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders.⁴⁴ Russia should ask for more systematic exchanges of experience in order to operationalize its own integration projects.

⁴⁴ M. Perkmann, "Cross-Border Regions in Europe, Significance and Drivers of Regional Cross-border cooperation", *European Urban and Regional Studies*, No 2, 2003, p. 156.