
Paris and the EU-Russia Dialogue: A New Impulse with Nicolas Sarkozy?



Thomas Gomart

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IFRI

27 RUE DE LA PROCESSION
75740 PARIS CEDEX 15 – FRANCE
TEL. : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 00
FAX : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 60
E-MAIL : ifri@ifri.org

EUR-IFRI

22-28, AVENUE D'AUDERGHEM
B – 1040 BRUXELLES
TEL. : 32(2) 238 51 10
FAX : 32 (2) 238 51 15
E-MAIL : info.eurifri@ifri.org

WEBSITE : www.ifri.org

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Author

Thomas Gomart is Head of Ifri's Russia/NIS Center and editor of the electronic collection *Russie.Nei.Visions* (available in three languages at www.ifri.org). He also teaches at the Saint-Cyr Special Military School. Previous works include: Th. Gomart and T. Kastueva-Jean (eds.), *Russie.Nei.Visions 2007. Understanding Russia and the New Independent States*, Paris, Ifri, 2007; *Politique étrangère*, special edition on Russia, "Enjeux internationaux et intérieurs" [Russia, International and Internal Stakes], September 2007.

Summary

The visit by French President Nicolas Sarkozy to Russia (October 2007) and the future French Presidency of the European Union (in the second half of 2008) call for a reflection on Franco-Russian relations and their structure within the broader framework of Russia-Europe relations. In the coming years, the nature of the EU-Russian dialogue will become a crucial issue, while Franco-Russian bilateral relations are now relegated to second place. This discrepancy is forcing French policy-makers to resort to a pragmatic and realistic approach in order to better combine the two agendas. This article examines the immediate issues at stake in the EU-Russian dialogue, the EU's attitude toward Russia and, conversely, Russia's attitude toward the EU. For each point, this article will examine whether the French stance has been sustained or if it has evolved.

Contents

AUTHOR	2
SUMMARY	3
CONTENTS	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
THE IMMEDIATE STAKES IN THE EU-RUSSIA DIALOGUE.....	8
TOWARD A NEW PCA?	8
ENERGY DIALOGUE OR MONOLOGUE?.....	10
TENSION BETWEEN INTERESTS AND VALUES.....	11
MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF EU POSITIONS.....	13
THE WEIGHT OF BILATERAL RELATIONS	13
"NEW EUROPE" AND "OLD EUROPE"	15
THE TRANSATLANTIC BACKGROUND.....	16
THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF RUSSIA'S POSITION	18
RUSSIA'S LACK OF ATTRACTION.....	18
UNCERTAINTY OVER THE DOMESTIC SITUATION	19
PREDOMINANCE OF SECURITY ISSUES	20
CONCLUSION	22

Introduction¹

While relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia have already changed, those between France and Russia are still in the process of doing so. In the coming years, the nature of the EU-Russia dialogue will become a key issue, while bilateral relations are henceforth a third-rate dossier. This discrepancy is forcing French decision-makers to resort to a pragmatic and realistic approach to better combine the bilateral agenda with the Euro-Russian agenda, which is clearly not limited to the EU.

Since the Samara summit (May 2007), relations between the EU and Russia have been marked by increased mistrust. Negotiations aimed at a new agreement, which were announced months ago, have yet to begin and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) expires in November 2007. Discussions are highly charged politically, owing to the hardening of Russia and the rift among EU Member States over the type of partnership to establish with Moscow. In fact, EU-Russian relations are still suffering the repercussions of the double EU/NATO enlargement of 2004, increased tension between the US and Russia, as well as uncertainty over the European Project. Dialogue is heavily weighted by a return to Cold War rhetoric. The day before the summit, for example, Peter Mandelson said that the current level of incomprehension and defiance had not been seen "since the end of the Cold War"².

Such degradation in the EU-Russia environment is manifest in uneasy discourse and agitated behavior, giving the impression that, on both sides, conduct is being dictated by the wind's direction. This general impression nevertheless needs to stand the test of reality, insofar as exchanges between the two parties are only intensifying. This overarching trend is also unlikely to disappear, due to the EU's energy needs and Russian society's desire to consume and open up. Prior to the Finnish Presidency (second half of 2006), a number of analyses agreed on the fact

¹ This article is the result of a project between the German Council on Foreign Policy (DGAP) and IFRI: "Paris und der EU-Russland-Dialog: neue Akzente unter Nicolas Sarkozy?" [Paris and the EU-Russian Dialogue: A New Emphasis Under Nicolas Sarkozy?] DGAP-Analyse Frankreich, No.3, October 2007. It furthers the article: "Union européenne/Russie: de la stagnation à la dépression" [The European Union and Russia: From Stagnation to Depression], *Revue du Marché commun et de l'Union européenne*, No. 510, July-August 2007.

Translated from French by Nicola Bigwood.

² Speech by Peter Mandelson, Bologna, 20 April 2007.

that relations had stagnated.³ Despite Helsinki's stated ambitions, the Finnish Presidency ended with a failure: Poland's veto of a mandate by the European Commission to negotiate the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). This setback put the German Presidency (first half of 2007) in a mediating position from the outset, forcing it to dedicate a significant portion of its political resources to regulating the disagreement between Russia and Poland, rather than to the reform of the partnership, as was announced. On both sides an impression of failure prevailed: EU-Russian relations no longer seem to be in a phase of stagnation but actually one of recession.⁴

Since Nicolas Sarkozy's election in May 2007, Franco-Russian relations have witnessed several changes, triggered in part by bilateral initiatives but mainly by the new President's initial orientations. Nicolas Sarkozy and Vladimir Putin met during G8 at Heiligendamm (June 2007)⁵; Total and Gazprom signed a highly ambitious agreement over the Shtokman gas field in the Barents sea (July 2007); Sarkozy referred to "a certain brutality" on Russia's part in the energy industry at the Ambassadors' Conference (August 2007); and Bernard Kouchner went to Moscow to express his differences of interest over Kosovo with Sergei Lavrov (September 2007). At the same time, four developments must be highlighted: the institutional re-launching of the EU by means of a simplified treaty; the rapprochement with the US; a more flexible stance toward the Turkish dossier with regard to election commitments; and a tougher stance toward Iran.

Russia is not a strategic priority for the new cabinet, leading Moscow to prolong the observation phase. Russia's reactions have remained discrete, as though the Kremlin were waiting for the media concern inherent in Sarkozy's action to die down a little before perhaps taking the initiative. However, attention is focused by the uncertainty surrounding Putin's succession (March 2008), pushing back foreign issues—especially French ones—to after 2008, with the notable exception of highly strategic dossiers that can be exploited politically, prime examples being missile defense systems and NATO enlargement. The case of Iran is not as politically charged in Moscow as in Paris and remains the domain of experts.

It is possible to glean a number of Russian responses in changes made in Paris.⁶ The first responses concern Sarkozy and his appointments. The possibility of, but especially the interest in, breaking with the "de Gaulle-Mitterrand-Chirac" legacy in foreign policy is a little perplexing. The

³ See, for example, S. Medvedev, *EU-Russian Relations. Alternative futures*, Helsinki, FIIA, 2006.

⁴ Th. Gomart, "Union européenne/Russie: de la stagnation à la dépression" [The European Union and Russia: From Stagnation to Regression], *Revue du Marché commun et de l'Union européenne*, No. 510, July-August 2007.

⁵ The French President's press conference, during which he qualified his Russian counterpart as "very informed about his dossiers, very calm and very intelligent," giving rise to unexpected media exploitation via the Internet.

⁶ Meetings in Moscow, July and September 2007.

new President demonstrates indisputable energy, his own style and efficiency in matters of political communication. Russian observers like to compare his physique with that of Putin and the media exposure of their wives: here the score is tied at one all. The Kremlin's PR represents Sarkozy as a novice in international (and particularly military) affairs in order to better emphasize Putin's experience. The Russian PR team wonders whether hesitation in choosing between appointing Hubert Védrine or Bernard Kouchner as Minister of Foreign Affairs in fact betrayed a deeper-rooted hesitation: whether to choose a realistic approach or an approach that would transform the international system. There is no attempt to hide either skepticism for the latter or surprise with regard to the appointment of Hervé Morin as Minister for Defense. Jean-David Levitte's personality and influence raises issues regarding the running of France's diplomatic system. Taking election pledges into account, Russian observers had expected efforts to be made in reaffirming transatlantic ties. However, they are at a loss to explain the reasons why this rapprochement is manifested in personal support for George Bush, a president at the end of his mandate and almost unanimously rejected by public opinion.

It must also be noted that these reactions from Moscow to changes in Paris are more anecdotal and less political than its reactions to the EU or NATO. To obtain an overall picture of EU-Russian relations, nine main points falling under three areas deserve to be examined: the state of the EU-Russia dialogue; the EU's attitude toward Russia; and, conversely, Russia's attitude toward the EU. For each point, this article will show whether the French position has been sustained or if it has evolved.

The Immediate Stakes in the EU-Russia Dialogue

Toward a new PCA?

Signed by both parties in June 1994, the PCA did not come into force until December 1997 because of the first war in Chechnya. The agreement aimed to bring Russia more in line with European legislation and standards in terms of trade. The signatories believed that the granting of the most-favored nation clause to Russia would, eventually, give rise to a free trade zone, while bearing in mind the conditions for political cooperation. With hindsight, the Russian authorities continually recall the fact that the PCA was negotiated while Russia was in a position of weakness, lacking sufficient technical skills to penetrate the mysteries of community mechanisms. Aside from the PCA, two other instruments form the EU-Russian backdrop: the "energy dialogue" begun in October 2000 and the "four common spaces" conceived in May 2003. Aimed at obtaining concrete results and following "roadmaps", these concerned economic matters, justice and internal affairs, foreign security and, lastly, culture, education and research. All of the above formed a system unlike any other for EU partners, dense with mixed bodies and working groups, including a Permanent Partnership Council. Despite its density and strong politicization with half-yearly summits, this system was unable to absorb the shocks of the 2004 double enlargement (NATO and the EU). In the first quarter of 2004, Russian demands led the EU to modify its position concerning new members and its own internal development. The European Commission openly voiced concern regarding tensions between interests and values across the partnership.⁷

This reminder helps to highlight the changes that have occurred since the double enlargement. At the technical level, Moscow intends to no longer be subjected to negotiations with a view to a new PCA but rather to participate in every phase of its development, thanks to an expertise mobilized to defend Russian interests—expertise which is now far from revering community dogma. Even if it is permeated by several schools of thought, this Russian expertise on the EU agrees on the principle of

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on relations with Russia, COM(2004), 9 February 2004.

defending Russian interests and is able to influence the debate.⁸ At the political level, Putin exudes great assurance vis-à-vis the EU. The EU no longer holds the same cardinal value as it did at the start of his first mandate, insofar as the Russian President has globalized his country's foreign policy.⁹ In his discourse, the Russian President never misses an opportunity to recall that his country "is an integral part of European civilization" and "completely [shares] the fundamental values and principles that form most Europeans' vision of the world". He has adopted Romano Prodi's expression: "everything but institutions".¹⁰

The European Commission's objective was to open negotiations ahead of the Samara summit by looking to incorporate the "four common spaces" into the new agreement and to include a major clause on energy. There are several reasons why this objective was not met. Firstly, Warsaw's veto (attributed to the embargo imposed on Polish meat by Moscow) portrays the serious deterioration of Russo-Polish relations. All attempts at mediation have failed since December 2006. Secondly, incidents in Estonia testify to the degree of resentment that still prevails between Moscow and the Baltic States in the search for better European solidarity. Thirdly, the climate of uncertainty that predominates on both sides with regard to Putin's succession and the institutional future of the EU. In addition to these obstacles is a lack of confidence and, undoubtedly, of willpower. The two parties—knowing each other too well or not well enough—have lost a great deal of interest in each other.

In this respect, it should be noted that the Russian side is keen "not to unduly dramatize" the lack of an agreement.¹¹ Without a new agreement, relations could continue to develop, insofar as the PCA will be renewed automatically. At the same time, both Moscow and the European capitals express high expectations for the French Presidency (second half of 2008). The French Presidency will follow the appointment of a new Russian President and should therefore benefit from a new dynamic on the Russian side. In Paris, preparations for the 2008 Presidency have already begun and should mobilize the state apparatus as well as the political, economic and expert circles in the coming months. In methodological terms, the German Presidency's experience showed that, in spite of genuine investment and detailed preparation, the political will to forge a new EU-Russian partnership could be blocked by bilateral disagreements. Armed with this experience, the French Presidency should set less ambitious, but attainable, objectives, taking care to closely involve the newer Member States.

⁸ N. Arbatova, "Russia-EU Beyond 2007: Russian Domestic Debates", *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 20, June 2007.

⁹ Th. Gomart, "Politique étrangère russe : l'étrange inconstance", [Russian Foreign Policy: Strange Inconsistency], *Politique étrangère*, No. 1, 2006.

¹⁰ V. Putin, "Vive le dialogue Europe-Russie !" [Long Live The European-Russian Dialogue!], *Le Monde*, 27 March 2007.

¹¹ Meeting with a member of the Russian Presidential Administration, July 2007.

Energy dialogue or monologues?

Since the gas cut-offs to Ukraine in January 2006 and the consequences they had on the European market, EU-Russian relations have focused on energy issues, at the risk of accentuating the double imbalance in their trade. The EU accounts for more than 57% of Russia's foreign trade, while Russia accounts for less than 6% of all of the EU's exports. Russian exports predominantly consist of energy products, whereas those of the EU are mainly manufactured products. This structural asymmetry is the most disconcerting, insofar as it tends to limit Russia to the role of energy (petrol and gas) provider for Europe, which directly affects its politico-economic organization. Russia provides 50% of the EU's natural gas and 20% of its petrol, accounting for 78% and 90% of Russia's exported petrol and gas respectively. In other words, 75% of Russia's export revenue depends directly on the single European energy market. The European Commission aims to integrate the energy sphere in a new PCA and to no longer content itself with an "energy dialogue"—an empty shell launched in October 2000 that has so far failed to reduce disagreements.

The difficulty of dialogue largely stems from contradictory definitions of "energy security", extremely different supply conditions in Member States, and Russia's increasing uncertainty, especially on the gas market. The EU regards "energy security" as access to enough resources at reasonable prices and, in regard to Russia, understands it in terms of interdependence. For Russia, "energy security" means access to solvent markets by reducing regulation constraints and obtaining long-term investment guarantees from consumer countries. In the gas sector, Russia understands it as maintaining Gazprom's monopoly, despite the European threat of including a "reciprocity clause" on market access conditions. The final aspect that can explain the current uncertainty is the functioning of Gazprom (its proximity to the Kremlin and its internal battles) and the volume of reserves it has available, which raises the issue of the Russian gas giant's ability to honor its export volumes without resorting for the most part to gas from Central Asia.¹²

Paris pays a great amount of attention to the development of Russian energy groups from two different angles. The first is to set up genuine industrial partnerships, not merely trade agreements. In a context of high demand, groups that control vast reserves of oil and gas are simply indispensable. From this perspective, the agreement signed between Total and Gazprom over the Shtokman field is indicative of the capacity of Paris' energy lobby to recover, after Russia announced it was to dismiss foreign operators (September 2006). Today, we tend to regard the reorganization of the Russian energy sector as having been completed with the

¹² For more on this debate, see Ch.-A. Paillard, "Gazprom, the Fastest Way to Energy Suicide", *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No.17, March 2007; J. Guillet, "Gazprom as a Predictable Partner. Another Reading of the Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Belarusian Energy Crises", *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 18, March 2007.

reinforcement of national companies in accordance with a model similar to that of other major producers (Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Venezuela and Iran). This new equilibrium of forces must be recognized. At the same time, the French authorities closely monitor Russian companies' investments in Europe—particularly those of Gazprom, which has been maneuvering to gain direct access to European consumers. The French authorities clearly assign greatest importance to the development of French energy companies, notably manifest in the Suez-Gaz de France merger. Paris believes that energy is and should remain a strategic sector, that is a sector over which public authorities have a duty to retain control. A common European energy policy is one of the priorities of the French Presidency.

Tension between interests and values

The considerable difference in nature between the EU and Russia is often highlighted in an attempt to explain their respective conduct. "Russian specificity" and "sovereign democracy" form the Kremlin's ideological cement. "Russian specificity" would suggest that Russia had an organization of power and a pace of development inherited from the past, two facts that Russian leaders would have a duty to reconcile. "Sovereign democracy" rejects any form of external influence on Russia or imitation of a development model. At a deeper level, Russia seems to want to demonstrate that the model of relations between state and society, as defended by the West, is less universal than it claims. The Kremlin's attitude is now to make the Europeans stop believing that "European civilization is better than Russian civilization."¹³

Failing to provide the necessary clarifications regarding its projects, borders and the nature of its international powers, the EU clouds its image without managing to become a credible player in security matters vis-à-vis NATO. Such duality is decisive to Moscow.¹⁴ The impression that Moscow is closed, self-confident, and even arrogant, must also be measured against European nervousness and inconsistency. The EU is seeking to move the balance of geopolitical power to the regulatory sphere, a stance that was tenable as long as Russia was receiving aid. Today, the EU's instruments—primarily technical aid and public diplomacy—are ill-suited for Russia's strong growth and its conduct as a global power. The Ukrainian crisis is a breaking point: regarded for the most part by the Europeans as an attempt by Russia to interfere in Ukrainian domestic affairs, it was regarded by Russia as an attempt by the West to foil Moscow's influence in the post-Soviet sphere. Russia's viewpoint reinforced the notion that the

¹³ Meeting with a Russian member of Parliament (Edinaâ Rossiâ), Moscow, December 2006.

¹⁴ R. Allison, "Russian Security Engagement with the European Union" and "Russian security engagement with NATO », in R. Allison, M. Light and S. White, *Putin's Russia and the Enlarged Europe*, London, RIIA/Blackwell, 2006, p. 72-93 and 94-129.

real geopolitical power on the European continent was still NATO—the main vehicle for US influence—and not the EU.

Unable to forge a geopolitical identity, the EU made the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) the focus point of its foreign affairs.¹⁵ Yet Russia always refused to be included in this framework, in order to highlight its will to retain an "equal" relationship. The EU's difficulty lies in reconciling ENP with a "strategic partnership" with Russia, the action of NATO—but also that of OSCE and the Council of Europe—and, last but not least, bilateral relations between the European capitals and Moscow.

On these issues Sarkozy's position marks a change. According to Sarkozy, multipolarity is not an end in itself but rather the start of a new alliance of the major powers, which could drift "toward the clash of power politics".¹⁶ Russia's conduct undoubtedly draws from this analysis. At present, the French authorities are not responding as to whether the ENP is adapted to a return to this logic of power relations. They are preparing more for the future debate over ENP's major geopolitical orientation. Among the latter's beneficiaries, arbitration between the southern and eastern countries will probably be required in order to avoid the excessive dilution of the EU's foreign action. The Mediterranean Union project can also be understood as a means of benefiting the former to the detriment of the latter.

¹⁵ Th. Gomart, "The EU and Russia: the Needed Balance Between Geopolitics and Regionalism", *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 10(b), May 2006.

¹⁶ Speech to the Ambassadors' Conference, 27 August 2007.

Main Characteristics of EU Positions

The weight of bilateral relations

EU-Russian relations cannot be understood without constantly monitoring bilateral relations, while always questioning whether these relations strengthen (as the main capitals claim officially) or weaken (as foreign observers do not fail to note) EU-Russian dialogue. During the period 2003-2007, a clear division became apparent over enlargement, the war in Iraq, the "Orange Revolution" and energy crises between Member States. On the one hand, those with a very critical view of Moscow—led by Poland and the Baltic States—wanted the EU to develop its discourse and action. On the other hand, parties with a closely interdependent relation with Moscow—driven by Berlin, Paris and, depending on the dossiers, London and Rome—wanted Russia to accept long-lasting compromises. Aside from its key role as an energy partner, Moscow is proving to be indispensable in dossiers beyond the scope of the EU and Russia (Iran, Kosovo and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

One of the current stakes is determining whether this division will continue or whether the EU will manage to reach a common position over Russian issues at the instigation of leaders less inclined, on the face of it, to value their "personal relation" with the Russian President. In other words, Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel and Romano Prodi, following on from Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schröder and Silvio Berlusconi, must redefine the political relation to be forged with Putin's successor, in close relation with their partners, and. Six months away from the Russian presidential elections, such uncertainty over Russian personal policy is the best example of the discrepancy between the Russian and European political systems.

However, the balance between capital cities and the spheres of their action should endure. At the risk of oversimplifying, the spheres of action could be mapped as follows. Berlin is and will continue to be Moscow's main partner within the EU. Encouraged by the state apparatus, the relation is deep-rooted in both societies. Ultimately, it fuels cooperation over energy. Skilled at dealing with the media, Angela Merkel has changed the

style of the talks without altering their content (major projects such as the North European Gas Pipeline [NEGP] are not reappraised).¹⁷

Russo-British relations have seen a slow deterioration since 2003, attributed to an accumulation of side issues: the political asylum granted to various people such as Boris Berezovsky; the reaction to the Yukos affair; and incidents related to the two countries' intelligence services.¹⁸ The poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko and the expulsion of Russian diplomats posted in London (July 2007) are representative of this deterioration, but must not overshadow the Russian community's increasing financial weight in the UK. More fundamentally, relational development is subordinate to two factors: the nature of the NATO-Russian partnership and the UK's energy situation. At the start of Putin's first mandate, Tony Blair actively encouraged rapprochement between NATO and Russia (resulting in the NATO-Russian Council in 2002). The increase in tension between the alliance and Russia caused by enlargement projects, the installation of US missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic and tensions in the Baltic States can also be felt in the bilateral sphere. In the field of energy, the UK has become a gas importer. Companies such as BP and Shell have made large-scale investments in Russia, which still in part depend upon political decisions.

Undoubtedly, the victory of the Polish PiS political party ("Law and Justice") in the legislative elections of September 2005 and the subsequent election of Lech Kaczynski as President have accentuated tension between Russia and Poland. Within the EU, Poland is the most critical country in regard to Moscow. These criticisms reflect concern over the hardening of Russia's domestic stance and denounce a new Russian imperialism based on energy. PiS advocates the reinforcement of the state's role in the country's political, economical and social life, while recommending a foreign policy based on the systematic defense of "Polish national interests", leading to skittish nationalism. This results in a less than conciliatory attitude toward the EU and a defiant one toward Germany. Owing to the closeness of Russo-German relations and the historically sensitive nature of Russo-Polish relations, Moscow acts as a foil to Warsaw's foreign policy: Russia would thus be seeking the "EU's disintegration".¹⁹ By contrast, other countries are seeking to forge new relations with Moscow, especially in the field of energy. Aside from Italy (ENI and Gazprom signed a long-term agreement in November 2006), other examples are Hungary, Greece and Bulgaria.

Paris believes that it must withdraw from bilateral talks and tired discourse over a "privileged relation" with Russia, which has added to the awkwardness of French positions within the EU since May 2005, without necessarily obtaining any tangible concessions from Moscow. Little by little,

¹⁷ A. Rahr, "Russie-Allemagne : la relation spéciale et la présidence de l'Union européenne" [The Special Russian-German Relation and the Presidency of the European Union], *Politique étrangère*, No. 1, 2007.

¹⁸ A. Monaghan (ed.), *The UK & Russia—A Troubled Relationship*, Swindon, Defence Academy of the UK, CSRC, Russian Series, 07/17, May 2007.

¹⁹ Meeting with a Polish diplomat, Moscow, December 2006.

the French Presidency and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs are seeking to avoid verbal confrontation of the sorts practised between Moscow and Washington, while avoiding lapsing into "accommodation"—the term most often used to characterize Jacques Chirac's Russia policy. The stated objective is to achieve a better coordination between Franco-Russian relations and the EU-Russian dialogue, without ever giving way to systematic Russia-bashing.

"New Europe" and "Old Europe"

The aftermath of the Iraq war continues to be felt in the EU-Russia framework. Moscow uses this division to accentuate discord between Member States and to try and regain influence in Central Europe via energy issues.²⁰ In addition to this legacy are the psychological effects of the French and Dutch rejection of the European constitution project. As far as Moscow is concerned, these results are the most obvious sign of the EU's lost attractiveness and the weakness of the European Project.

Moscow's declarations and decisions generate uncertainty over its real intentions: these do not have the same effect in Berlin, Paris, London, Warsaw, Rome, Helsinki or Budapest. Yet Moscow is perfectly aware of this wide spectrum of reactions and makes use of it. They are in line with a willingness to reconsider relations with the West in general and with the EU in particular.

In this respect, Russian-Polish relations are particularly important. The deterioration of relations cannot only be explained by Poland's veto. Moscow understood perfectly well that Warsaw's excessiveness, the nature of the current regime and the degree of closeness with the US marginalized Poland within the EU.²¹ Warsaw wanted to place relations with Moscow in the field of values, despite its government taking decisions that greatly embarrassed its European partners. Moscow exploited these contradictions, seeking to stigmatize Poland as an anti-Russian country in favor of returning to the Cold War schism. Certainly, the heated debate over missile defense systems will not fail to create new tensions.

On this issue, Sarkozy's willingness to mark a break with the past is clear. The transatlantic partnership is to be restored, definitively turning the page on opposition to the Iraq war and removing anti-Americanism as one of the invisible pillars of French foreign policy. To this end, Kouchner went to Baghdad and the Bush family hosted Sarkozy (August 2007). As a sign

²⁰ K. Smith, "Russian Energy Pressure Fails to Unite Europe", Washington, CSIS, Euro-Focus, January 2007.

²¹ A. Makarychev, "Neighbours, Exceptions and the Political: A Vocabulary of EU-Russian Inter-Subjective (Dis)Connections", in Michael Emerson (ed.), *The Elephant and the Bear Try Again*, Brussels, CEPS, 2006, p. 23-24.

of good will, he decided to "increase" France's efforts in Afghanistan and to better integrate French operations with those of NATO. The real unknown in this step is the attitude that Paris will adopt vis-à-vis the alliance's military structure in the coming months. It is on precisely this point that, more or less informally, Russian experts and diplomats have the most questions.

The transatlantic background

On the strategic level, Russia's point of reference remains the US. Indeed, the nuclear equilibrium reinforces its status as a global power, relative to European countries. It can scarcely be doubted that Russian diplomacy will take a tougher stance as projects to set up US bases in Poland and the Czech Republic take shape. In April 2007, Putin announced a moratorium on the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which has been a cornerstone of European security since the fall of the USSR, while castigating US unilateralism. In addition to this, a veto on Kosovo was announced, which can be understood as the Kremlin's willingness to reposition itself as a key player—rather than a subject—of European security matters, in the face of an EU which is struggling to prove credible in this area.²²

US-Russia relations form a backdrop that is vital for understanding EU-Russia relations.²³ After Ukraine, Washington progressively took a harder line with regard to Moscow, particularly via Dick Cheney's speech at Vilnius (May 2006)—considered to be a deliberate provocation of Moscow—or that of George Bush in Prague (June 2007). Since then, Russian diplomacy has answered tit for tat, exploiting the anti-Americanism provoked by the Bush administration's behavior. Reaction to US policy is one of the key aspects of its conduct and is found in speeches such the one given by Putin in Munich (February 2007). In the post-Soviet sphere, Moscow ascertains that Ukraine's move toward Euro-Atlantic structures has been seriously complicated since the return of Viktor Yanukovich and the permanent political crisis. Toward authoritarian regimes in countries such as Uzbekistan, Moscow provides security guarantees, avoiding references to "democracy promotion" or "respect of human rights", unlike Washington or Brussels. Moreover, Moscow accords significant political and diplomatic resources to multilateral structures aiming to counterbalance Euro-Atlantic structures in Eurasia (Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization).²⁴

²² O. Antonenko, "Russia and the Deadlock" over Kosovo", *Russie.Nei. Visions*, No. 21, juillet 2007.

²³ M. McFaul, "Russia and the West: A Dangerous Drift", *Current History*, October 2005.

²⁴ O. Antonenko, "The EU should not ignore the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation", London, CER, May 2007.

However, this increase in influence is not enough to outline a true European policy for Russia, that is, an attitude that would enable it to depart from a logic of constant adaptation to European decisions. By maintaining its current organization of power based on an over-representation of security services at the top levels of government, it runs the risk of only exercising power through the provision of energy resources and its interference in security matters. While this may not exactly be considered trivial, it is nevertheless not sufficient in itself for Russia to take up the challenges it faces.

These challenges concern the choice of a development model. On this point, a debate has begun dawning in the US that could modify interpretations of Russia by linking them to those pertaining to China. Indeed, Bush directly associated Beijing and Moscow in his speech at Prague, indicating that Washington would continue to exert democratic pressure on them. This political classification heralds a development tending to make democracy promotion an answer to the power logic denounced by the Bush administration. Leaving aside the Islamic threat, the budding debate has returned to the historical opposition between liberalism and authoritarianism—an opposition that indicates future tension between democratic and authoritarian countries, in particular China and Russia.²⁵ In terms of development, these two countries are no longer concealing their skepticism toward the liberal Western model; they regard their development as having been achieved by breaking away from Western economic dogma while still playing the globalization game.²⁶ This debate will not fail to reach France via transatlantic channels, and could alter Russia's approach by favoring a Eurasian rather than Western understanding of its development. As we have seen, Sarkozy subscribes to this analysis of returning power logics to the international stage. On the other hand, it is not said that the French diplomatic system subscribes to a joint understanding of the respective rise in power of Russia and China, particularly with regard to their effects on Western leadership.

²⁵ R. Kagan, "The World Divides...and Democracy is at Bay", *The Sunday Times*, 2 September 2007. For further details, see R. Kagan, "End of Dreams, Return of History", *Policy Review*, August-September 2007.

²⁶ P. Ferdinand, "Russia and China: converging responses to globalization", *International Affairs*, No. 4, 2007.

The Main Characteristics of Russia's Position

Russia's lack of attraction

It should not be assumed that Russia aims to uselessly harden its relation with the EU, owing to the European market's crucial importance for its own economic growth. Nevertheless, it is not in a logic of integration—even a progressive one—with the EU. It defends the principle of interaction that is not based on a system of constraints and common values. One of the main characteristics of Russia's foreign policy lies precisely in this incapacity to draw up, propose and carry out a positive integration project based on a system of joint decision-making, regardless of the partner involved. This inability ruins all attempts at political integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The concept of "sovereign democracy" has repercussions on foreign policy and affects the nature of dialogue with the EU. Russia is basically adopting a defensive position, regarding European regulations and standards as attacks on its sovereignty. At the same time, its political willingness to integrate the economic world via accession to the WTO implies an acceptance of a system of regulations.²⁷ The issue at stake for Moscow should be to adapt to this system while seeking to use its increase in political influence to take control over the drawing up of common regulations. Similarly, the country's financial resources should be geared more toward the main challenges that confront Russia (technological integration, education of the population, demographic decline, organization of immigration and emigration, and the health crisis).

Putin's Eurasian inflections have not escaped Paris. Not without success, Putin has applied himself to portraying an image of his country modernizing and opening up, and now being part of globalization. A relatively recent development includes Putin regularly referring to the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) in order to present Russia as a power of tomorrow. BRIC's total GNP is now higher than that of the EU and, according to Putin, the economic potential of these new centers of

²⁷ J. Vercueil, "Russia and the WTO: On The Finishing Stretch", *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 16, February 2007.

global growth should result in "political influence".²⁸ At this point, Sarkozy's omission in his speech at the Ambassadors' Conference must be noted: the French President cited only China, India and Brazil as "emerging giants" and as "driving world growth". This omission is significant of the reticence of certain French circles to envisage Russia as one of tomorrow's economic powers, since energy resources account for a large portion of its revenue. However, other circles continually turn the authorities' attention toward Russia's capacity for investments: Russia has the third largest foreign exchange reserve in the world (behind China and Japan) and is preparing to set up sovereign funds, aimed precisely at mounting a raid on the stock exchanges of European, Asian and US markets.

Uncertainty over the domestic situation

Uncertainties over Putin's succession weigh heavily on the EU-Russian dialogue insofar as Putin made the EU his primary objective in 2000. Even if it will not be one of the issues at stake in the next elections in Russia (legislative in December 2007, presidential in March 2008), Russia's relations with Europe remain the Kremlin's point of reference, but nothing indicates that Putin's successor will give the same importance to this partnership.

More fundamentally, Europeans are concerned about increased authoritarianism in Russia and its possible ramifications for foreign policy, since this increase is seen to undoubtedly go hand in hand with a revival of nationalism—the effects of which are beginning to be felt in the attitude adopted toward the Baltic States. Having new means at its disposal, it is highly likely that Moscow will continue paying greatest attention to Russian minorities. At the same time, the next Russian President will pursue one of Putin's objectives, namely that of not allowing Russian nationals to be subjected to the EU's visa system. Symbolic, the visa issue touches on the prestige and image Russia has made of its power in Europe. Conditional access to its market is one of the EU's prime assets. Progress was made on this point between the two parties with the signing of a re-admission agreement at the Samara summit.

Paris shares a similar interpretation of Russia's domestic developments as its European partners, particularly Berlin and London. Russia's restriction of political freedoms and its tougher stance on foreign policy should not prevent dialogue with Moscow from still being considered essential. A tough but inevitable partner, Russia remains a difficult country to understand: six months ahead of the elections, it is still impossible to put

²⁸ For an analysis of this development, see Th. Gomart, "Espace-temps perdu, espace-temps retrouvé", [Space-time lost, space-time found], *Politique étrangère*, special edition "La Russie. Enjeux internationaux et intérieurs" [Russia. International and Internal Stakes], September 2007, p. 7-22.

forward with any certainty a name for Putin's successor. As far as Putin is concerned, the idea of creating a sort of Russian "De Gaulle" that had long prevailed among politico-diplomatic circles has been forgotten, notably due to the degree of corruption in Putin's immediate entourage.²⁹

Predominance of security issues

It is all too often forgotten that in carrying out its European policy, Moscow continues to prioritize security issues and to conceive relations with its neighbors in terms of territorial integrity and balance of powers. In other words, Moscow has preserved the traditional concept of power, while the EU has attempted to invent a new model for the international player. This mindset has resulted in Moscow never forgoing military factors. The revival of the military budget is not only explained by the desire to make up for the Yeltsin era but also by a willingness to create a new military tool, capable of a global presence (notably via the weaponization of space) and regional projections. Logic dictates that the latter should answer to a new analysis of threats facing the country.

The Kremlin has catered to a system based on internal and external threats that are necessary to justify an organization of power that grants a large role to structures of force and a massively expanded military tool. Such exacerbated sovereignty leads Russia to a policy of independence aimed at openly defending its national interests, everywhere and always. The Europeans struggle to understand that "frozen conflicts", such as Kosovo, are part of this logic of defending national interests and of wanting to deal a definitive, final blow to the lack of influence during the Yeltsin era in the post-Soviet sphere, particularly with regard to Europe. In addition to this comes the will to savor revenge over the West, too confident of its own strengths and rights during the transition period. There is nothing to indicate that Putin's successor will soften this strong trend, insofar as the political forces that advocate even progressive integration with the West are considerably marginalized today.

In the coming months, Sarkozy will have to express an opinion on two strategic areas: the US project of missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, and NATO enlargement. One side of the argument put forward by Russia on the US project seems to be acceptable in part in Paris and in Berlin, namely that this deployment does not correspond to engagements undertaken by Washington and NATO vis-à-vis Moscow during the 1980s, even if it is being carried out bilaterally.³⁰ However, Paris does not buy the Russian argument that the US shield is intended to limit Russia's ballistic capacity, easily able to overload any

²⁹ Th. Gomart, "La politique russe de la France: fin de cycle?", [France's Russian Policy: The End of the Cycle?], *Politique étrangère*, No. 1, 2007, p. 125-127.

³⁰ Meeting with a German in charge of negotiations, Berlin, June 2007.

defense system. As far as NATO enlargement is concerned, Paris is known to have reserves, the priority being to “digest” previous enlargements. In addition, Paris tends to distinguish more and more between the Ukrainian and Georgian issues. With regard to Ukraine, the country's political development is still uncertain, and it appears that accession to NATO is not favored. As far as Georgia is concerned, it is thought that accession would not automatically regulate Abkhazia and South Ossetia's vague secessionist desires, but could very well encourage them instead.

Conclusion

Broadly outlined, the French stance on the nine main points in the EU-Russian dialogue—in its widest sense and not solely via exchanges between the European Commission and the Kremlin—required clarification. On the eve of Nicolas Sarkozy's first visit to Russia, which is planned for mid-October 2007, several ideas may be considered as a springboard for action:

- 1) Reconcile France's Russia policy with that of its European partners, while seeking a nearly systematic articulation of Franco-Russian relations in terms of the EU-Russian dialogue.
- 2) Avoid the "provincialization" of the EU-Russia relationship. Washington remains Moscow's strategic point of reference, which leads Russia to perceive the EU-Russian dialogue as a form of subsidiary of its broader relation with the West. The stake lies in remembering that, owing to their intensification and volume, European-Russian exchanges are destined to be the basis of the EU-Russia-US triangle.
- 3) Engage in an intellectual effort to rethink means of action outside the EU with regard to Russia, moving away from aid programs. Give priority to jointly financed projects.
- 4) Refuse to restrict EU-Russian dialogue to energy issues, but place them instead within a wider political context that would allow the modes of politico-economic development and cross-investment to be dealt with.
- 5) Prepare a common European position in light of the US lobby for a Transcaspian pipeline and Russia's likely response.
- 6) Plan for possible common reactions from the EU on an electoral process in Russia that would be undermined by great irregularities. Collectively organize the initial contact with the new Russian President.
- 7) Learn to think of Russia beyond the Urals. This implies a detailed analysis of Moscow's influence, and pivotal position, on the Eurasian landmass. Link this effort together with the EU's strategy for Central Asia.