



# THE EUROPEAN GEOPOLITICAL FORUM

## Bringing Russia into NATO: A Trojan horse in the making

### EGF Editorial

Is there any logic behind suggestions aired by senior decision makers, both past and present, that Russia could one day become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)? At first glance, Russian membership to NATO may seem as a suggestion bordering on the absurd, given the history of relations between East (Russia/the Soviet Union) and West (the Euro-Atlantic bloc), as well as the fact that “Cold War warriors” are still in positions of power and influence on both sides of the former-Iron Curtain. That being said, the prospect of Moscow joining the NATO alliance has been implied publically by former-Russian presidents, Boris Yeltsin in 1991, Vladimir Putin in 2000, and by former-NATO Secretary-General, Lord Robertson, at a high level political conference in the Russian city of Yaroslavl just last September.

Many opinion shapers in Europe argue that “these are now different times in which we live”. NATO’s *raison d’être* as a defence umbrella protecting the European mainland from Moscow’s “hard threat” is now outdated and, despite persisting moments of tension, Europeans should instead consider how to best incorporate Russia into European institutional space. This applies just as much in terms of security, the argument goes, as well as resonant discussions on EU-Russia economic relations. Recent weeks have seen a flurry of high level, diplomatic activity further perpetuating the idea of Russian-NATO integration. On October 18-19, French President Sarkozy and German Chancellor Merkel hosted Russian President Dmitry Medvedev at a tri-partite summit in the French resort town of Deauville, which some experts have described as an attempt by Paris and Berlin to “pull together to present Russia’s candidacy to NATO”. Deauville preceded the Lisbon NATO Summit of November 19-20, which was billed as one of the most important meetings of the Alliance in recent history. Relations with Russia, together with the vexing question of Afghanistan, were at the top of the Lisbon agenda.

Debates within the security and political establishments of the Euro-Atlantic countries as to how to further pursue relations with Russia appear highly evident at present. The Deauville Summit is itself an outcome of such debates, reflecting the position of mainstream European states such as France and Germany, which would like to see a more inclusive relationship with Moscow. The Anglo-American position, together with some of the newer EU member states and former-Moscow allies in the Warsaw Pact, advocates a more truculent policy. Within the context of the NATO relationship, they have shown far more eagerness to reach out to Georgia and Ukraine, as opposed to Moscow – to the chagrin of the latter, needless to say. However, whilst a broad-based, trans-Atlantic consensus on Russia is yet to emerge, and while discussions of closer ties between Russia and NATO once again appear to be in fashion, the likelihood of any further momentum towards Russian membership to the Alliance was put to rest in Lisbon by none other than the Russian president himself.

In a speech addressing the delegates and guests at the Lisbon Summit, in contrast to his predecessors in previous years, President Medvedev stated in surprisingly clear language that he did not believe that Russia could become a member of the Alliance at any time soon. He likewise added that Russia would only accept any joint initiatives with NATO on the basis of equal partnership and that Moscow would expect joint decision making powers in any such ventures – be they through joint instruments such as the Russia-NATO Council or collaborative initiatives relating to missile defence, Afghan security,



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terrorism, Somali pirates, etc. While it is fine to assume that the head of the Russian state was reflecting present-day Russia's greater confidence as an international relations actor in his remarks, Medvedev's comments also mask the fact that in strategic terms, there would be very little value for Moscow in pursuing Alliance membership. To the contrary, anything more than cooperation with NATO in the areas of security challenges which Russia and the Alliance have in common (including those mentioned above), would not only hinder Russian national interest, it would undermine Moscow's strategic position in Eurasia, as well as severely weaken NATO itself – possibly fatally. Here are four reasons why, which surfaced during a recent online debate about Russian relations with NATO between a group of Russian and international security experts and political scientists. The debate was held on the website of the European Geopolitical Forum

(1). Eurasian balance of power. NATO was originally conceived as a regional alliance promoting collective defence in wake of the military-strategic threat posed to Europe by the once mighty Soviet Union and its own defence alliance of East European vassal governments, the Warsaw Pact. This created a balance of power in Europe – a “bloc mentality” forged around two rival, well armed camps – which evaporated during the 1990s following the end of the Cold War and the decline of Russian power in the international arena. During this past decade, the configuration of Eurasian geopolitics has changed, which is not only reflected by Russia's re-emergence as an active political force in wider-Europe, but also by the rise in importance of China, India, Turkey, the Gulf and the Caspian states. Some Russian Eurasianists like to talk of the rise of RIKI (Russia, India, China [*Kitai* in Russian lang.] and Iran). This has created a new balance of power in Eurasia, underscored by Russian cooperation with China, more active engagement in the Middle East and endorsement of regimes non-aligned to Western policy in the region. Russian entry into NATO would radically change this state of affairs. With NATO's borders encompassing Russia, China could succumb to a new state of encirclement, while the Arab street, which remains attached to the idea of Russian counter-balance to US policy in the region, would conspire to the view that Moscow has switched to the camp of its foes.

(2). Russian influence in the former-Soviet Union (FSU). Russia's Permanent Representative to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, recently stated that “Great powers do not enter alliances. They make alliances”. While we could debate as to the degree that today's Russian Federation is in actuality a great power, Moscow still provides a form of leadership to inter-governmental security organisations encompassing other-former Soviet Republics, predominantly the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. There is also the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which is driven by both Beijing and Moscow, operating across Eurasia. Both organisations function with the mentality of some level of counter-weight to NATO, at least in Eurasia. Both serve to further deepen the Eurasian balance of power which has been emerging during the 2000s. And both organisations would fall apart were Russia to join NATO.

(3). Sovereign democracy. Russian experts readily concede that NATO is an alliance of states endorsing largely similar social and political philosophies. The Russian Federation, by contrast, as a relatively new state which has inherited many old, Soviet institutions, is seeking consolidate upon its own form of democracy over which it is sovereign. Unlike the NATO countries, which are ready to cede part of their sovereignty for the collective good of the Alliance, Russia prefers to maintain full sovereignty over national decision making, particularly in strategic areas. Russia would be compelled to surrender (some degree of) sovereignty over its nuclear missile capability to Brussels-based NATO if it was to join the alliance, something for which Moscow is hardly ready.

(4). Fragmentation of NATO internal decision making. Despite the fact that it is often viewed as the vanquished party in the decades-long Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West, the Russian Federation has never been an easy negotiating partner for NATO. No shortage of testing moments



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between Moscow and the Alliance are evident in recent memory. Serbia (1999) and Georgia (2008) are just two examples. Were Russia to join NATO, these areas of structural disagreement between the two parties would be incorporated into the heart of the decision making process inside the Alliance itself. Russia would bring with it a bagful of disputes with the FSU countries and seek to turn these into problems for the alliance to resolve. The Alliance would also become a playground for further disputes between former-Warsaw Pact members who have since joined NATO in order to protect themselves from Moscow. National interests would seriously hamper any notions of “the collective good”, leading to the further fragmentation of internal NATO decision making and possible collapse of the Alliance itself.