



*Building European capacity to meet  
the challenges of the 21st century*

## **The Procedural Foundations of the European Security Order: Russian and “Western” Perspectives**

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The preferences of Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community differ greatly with regard to the processes and forms of further development of the European regional order. Nevertheless, a compromise is possible if the sides can agree on the procedural frameworks and rules for the development of this order without pre-determining the outcome of the evolution.

Transferring the concept of moral and ethical values from the world of people to the community of states and international institutions is a difficult task from a methodological point of view. The regulatory foundations of the European international order (including the security interests of the participants in this order) consist not in specific values or principles, but in rules that guide the evolution of the order. The supremacy of these rules distinguishes the “European World” from other regional orders, for example, the East Asian or Latin American regional orders. The European order is essentially “procedural”.

### *Norms and the European Security Architecture*

A normative assessment of the European order concerns not so much the shape of this order at a given point in time, but the process of its evolution or conservation. The normative principles reside in the specificities of the process rather than in any current or desired status quo. From the normative point of view, European security is *the process whereby the European order constantly adapts to changing external and internal conditions*. Thus, the main aim of the European security architecture are to avoid abrupt and uncontrolled change while remaining open to evolution under the influence of a changing internal and external environment.

The above interpretation of normative foundations has two major consequences. *First*, the European order defies attempts to conserve any status quo for an indefinite period of time. A trend in the evolution of the European order may have negative implications for the declared interests of a specific player, but attempts to arrest that trend on the part of a minority of participants in the order are unlikely to succeed.

Such attempts are akin to building a dam across a big river that results in bypass ways being discovered. For example, the provision of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany on

possible reunification with the “eastern lands” without reforming the foundations of the German state prevailed over the norms of the “inviolability of borders” in Europe enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

*Second*, under European order specific policy goals are achieved gradually, preferably through a highly institutionalized and juridical procedure, and with the consent of the largest possible number of participants (at times, over the opposition of a small dissenting minority).

The process of evolution must be informed by an idea of progress that justifies and often determines the direction of this evolution. Such motivating ideas may include economic development, democratization of the internal politics of participating states, humanization of international relations, etc. Sometimes the implementation of a certain idea of progress (for example, quickly bridging the economic development gap between Western and Eastern Europe) eventually turns out to be problematic, but for a certain period of time the idea commands a consensus of national and transnational policy-making elites and serves as their roadmap.

*Third*, the subjects of the European order set a high premium on the mutual transparency of intentions and predictability of actions. Maintaining uncertainty with regard to one’s intent on issues that are vital for the other members of the community is not an acceptable form of behaviour in the contemporary European order. Even if the intentions of one player run counter to the declared interests of others, these intentions are usually proclaimed openly. For example, the referendum on the United Kingdom’s membership in the European Union was announced about two years ahead of the scheduled date. This gave London and its EU partners time to discuss the ways to adapt the terms of UK’s participation within the European Union.

Predictability and stability of intentions of the players in the European order are ensured by the relatively transparent procedures of the players’ decision-making. The players are not obliged to disclose to the world all their intentions and plans on every conceivable issue. However, they are expected to give upfront answers on issues that are essential for other participants.

European nations usually avoid abrupt foreign policy changes or surprise manoeuvres aimed at achieving unilateral advantages, even if not at the expense of other players. In other words, springing surprises on one another is not common practice. The EU and NATO countries set their long-term strategic priorities in the 1950s and adapted them to the changed situation in the early 1990s. Over the course of six decades, neither grave economic crises nor the organizational problems of interaction within NATO and the EU caused these organizations to substantially rethink their place – and main goals – in the region and the world.

*Fourth*, if abrupt changes in the policy of the actors with regard to each other or to common goals do occur, they are justified by exceptional and convincing considerations. For example, attempts to erect barriers on the national borders within the Schengen zone in 2015 were explained by the respective governments by the unprecedented and uncontrolled influx of immigrants from the Middle East whose presence could affect social and political stability in the receiving countries.

Changes of intentions arising from public opinion or sentiments are considered to be valid. Only a referendum or a near-unanimous vote in parliament confers legitimacy on a drastic change of the position of an EU or NATO member state, for example, accession to or withdrawal from the European Union or the euro area. Participants in the European order generally reject references to “supreme

national interests” formulated exclusively by the country’s elite (let alone one or several of its leaders) as justification for a sudden and risky change of intentions.

Although the European order is averse to sharp and sudden change, it is fairly flexible when it comes to details. It is supposed to recognize new realities and adapt itself to them even if these realities have arisen against the will of the main players. Examples in point are the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the willingness of the post-communist Central and Eastern European states to become integrated into the EU and NATO, the increased flow of refugees heading for Western Europe from conflict zones in the Middle East in 2015, the debt crisis of the South European EU members, the slump of the euro and the economic slowdown. Up until now, the relative effectiveness of the bureaucratic apparatus, including the EU bureaucracy, and the constructive involvement of civil society has enabled the Europeans to cope with the difficulties without drastically revising the basic principles of their foreign policy and the foreign policies of individual NATO and EU countries.

### *What Principles of the European Order are Important for Each Side?*

For the participants in *the Western segment of the European order*, the sense of progress that determines policy goals is vital. If the sense of progress is lost, demands for a policy shift become more vocal both among the elites and the wider electorate.

The experience of positive change that has taken place in Western Europe over the 70 years since the end of World War II (resolved conflicts, greater security, economic growth, strengthening of democracy and human rights) has created a sense among the populations of EU and NATO states that reforms always bring benefits and has made Europeans confident in their ability to adapt to external shifts and shocks without giving up their ideas of progress.

Faith in reform has guided the EU in tackling the Greek debt crisis, for example. Athens was left with no other option but to tailor expenditures to revenues, improving economic efficiency and identifying new sources of economic growth. Similarly, proceeding from the notion that democratic transformations in North African countries were necessary and inevitable, France and Britain decided to recognize the opposition forces in Libya and provide direct military support to them in the spring of 2011.

Major West European powers are somewhat less inclined than the United States to change policy goals and directions for the sake of progress and “making the world a better place”. These nations rely more on institutions that had already been created, so that only dramatic shifts in external or internal circumstances could induce them to embark on institutional reforms. Europeans generally seek to extend the time required for change to take place in order to cushion its effect and to be able to adjust the process at any stage.

US political culture usually demands a “policy” (a clear-cut action plan) in response to any existing or putative problem. Thus, in spite of the warnings by many economists, the European Union chose not to resolve the Greek debt problem completely in 2010–11, when the price of writing off the debt or a Greek default would probably have been significantly smaller than three years down the road. Similarly, in spite of the pleas from many quarters, the EU and its members are in no hurry to provide massive economic and organizational assistance to Ukraine, essentially limiting its support for Ukrainian reform to anti-Russian sanctions.

On its part, *Russia* has been complaining about its vulnerability in the face of Western superiority in the main parameters of national power. Moscow has also stated that it is “disappointed” with the prospect of an “alliance with the West”.<sup>1</sup> It has resisted unfavourable changes in relative power and sought to secure recognition by the West of Russia’s status. Moscow would like to secure the status quo that is slipping away, or else swing the status quo in its own favour. Russia also seeks to reserve the unconditional right to influence the ongoing changes.

For Moscow, recognizing Russia’s status is more important than meeting its concrete current demands. Status is the political capital that can be used to influence multilateral decisions at any time and on any issue. Status is a universal currency; it is highly liquid, unlike agreements on a specific issue between rival players. Status is converted into profit in games with both high and low levels of antagonism. Russian leaders insist on recognition of the country’s status when they demand “equal partnership” with other actors, regardless of the specific nature of the problem being negotiated. Status is also important for other major European powers – the United Kingdom, France and increasingly Germany.

Conservatism, which is paradoxically combined in the Russian approach to the European order with a penchant for sudden manoeuvres aimed at sharply changing the status quo in its favour (the 2008 war in Georgia, the Crimean takeover in 2014, and the Syria operation in 2015), stems from the experience of negative consequences that major global and regional changes have brought to Russia over the last 70–80 years. The geopolitical shifts in Europe at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s led to the tragedy of the Second World War. The post-war attempts at social mobilization and then demobilization and, finally, the experience of sweeping Perestroika and market reforms led Russians to regard change, whether spontaneous or deliberate, with irony and cynicism at best, and with fear at worst.

Besides, since the mid-1990s, Moscow has increasingly felt that changes in the European order were happening in spite of Russia’s will and, later, since the mid-2000s, that these changes were engineered in order to harm Russia’s interests.

Against this psychological background, Russian leaders in the early 2010s concluded that internal political conservatism, i.e., rejection of radical reform, resonated with the public sentiments of the Russian people. In foreign policy, conservatism meant the preservation of the status quo (or even a return to the situation of the 1980s) and enhancing Russia’s formal and actual status by generating uncertainty through surprise manoeuvring.

### *Overcoming Differences: Is the European Order in Need of a “Systemic Reform”?*

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple publications by astute observers of Russian politics and foreign policy, such as Sergey Karaganov, Dmitri Trenin, or Mikhail Zygar, have described Russian President Vladimir’ Putin’s shift from attempts to embrace the West early in his tenure at the Kremlin to his conviction that the United States, NATO, and the EU were inherently hostile to Russia and its interests and that finding a compromise with would be difficult, if at all possible. See: Sergey Karaganov, ‘Evropa: porazhenie iz ruk pobedy? [Europe: Defeat out of the jaws of victory?]', *Russia in Global Affairs*, January–February 2015, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Evropa-porazhenie-iz-ruk-pobedy-17304>; Dmitri Trenin, *From Greater Europe to Greater Asia: The Sino-Russian Entente*, (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2015), [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_Trenin\\_To\\_Asia\\_WEB\\_2015Eng.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Trenin_To_Asia_WEB_2015Eng.pdf); Mikhail Zygar, ‘Vsya kremlevskaya rat’: *Kratkaya istoriya sovremennoi Rossii*, [All the Kremlin’s Men: A Brief History of Contemporary Russia], Moscow: Intellectual Literature, 2016.

The European security architecture is not a rigid system. Instead, it is a process of a slow but steady evolution of the order in the direction indicated by the “arrow of progress”. Can the recognition of Russia’s status be “inscribed” into this process?

The answer need not be negative. The solution may consist in agreeing on certain procedural rules acceptable to the sides. Such rules would not however predetermine the direction or outcomes of the evolution of the European order.

For example, the parties could agree on rules to guide the process of NATO expansion without granting Moscow a veto over the enlargement. Tensions could be eased by an agreement whereby NATO enlargement would not be seen as a political imperative by Brussels, i.e., as a process on which the viability of the alliance hinges. Each round of NATO expansion should be openly and transparently justified by Brussels as increasing the alliance’s defence capability by adding new members. The alliance should not expand if the admission of a candidate country spells no obvious benefit to NATO members in terms of strengthening collective security.

Similarly, the process of EU enlargement or rapprochement between the EU and the states around Russia must be accompanied by intensive good-faith consultations to ensure that both Brussels and the candidate countries take Russia’s concerns into account.

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The set of moral and ethical values that form the foundation of the current European order is limited. The widely recognized norms are “procedural” in character and imply a clear idea of the desired future (expanding and strengthening the security community, overcoming economic disparities in Europe, etc.) as the long-term policy goal. A participant in the European order may temporarily renounce the “progressive” image of the future in its policy due to parochial national interest considerations. However, such a decision would exact a heavy price from such a participant, because other players would refuse to interact with the offender on the usual favourable terms.

While not being able to stop the undesirable trends in the evolution of the European security architecture (NATO expansion, the “drawing” of Russia’s CIS partners into exclusive relations with the European Union, etc.), Moscow has ample opportunity to negotiate with other participants in the European order on the procedural aspects and criteria justifying the need for action that could infringe upon Russia’s security interests.