



**INSTITUT EUROPÉEN DES RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES**

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### **THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RUSSIAN STRATEGIES IN EUROPE, THE MIDDLE-EAST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**

#### **THREE GEOPOLITICAL VISIONS**

Irnerio SEMINATORE, Jacques LIPPERT, Pierre-Emmanuel THOMANN

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## **SUMMARY**

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

**Irnerio SEMINATORE**

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### **UKRAINE-SYRIA :**

### **TWO FACES OF THE GEOPOLITICAL RUSSIAN GAME**

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### **THE MISTRUST ABOUT THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP**

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### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

**Irnerio SEMINATORE**

The fundamental goal of the Union in the case of the European enlargement and neighbourhood policy was the political stability, which is not to be confused with diplomatic and strategic concerns, practicing insurance and counter-insurance policies peculiar to every realistic and geopolitical foreign policy. However, Russian diplomacy and strategic thinking tried to organise the new spaces of power in Eurasia, based on a view of international and internal political evolutions, reconciling arguments of legitimacy, the ruling regimes and the political independence of some peoples and nations. The longing for an “improved statu quo” and “privileged interests”, claimed in Ukraine, in Georgia, in the Caucasus and in Syria, characterized the Russian drafting of the “Treaty of global security in Europe” December 2009. This new framework of « indivisible security », enhancing the value of national interests and therefore « equal security » of state actors, puts the European solidarity into crisis, limits the influence of the Western world and weakens the enlargement and

neighbourhood policy. The « coloured revolutions », the European enlargement first in Central Europe and then in the Mediterranean area, and the autonomist, or even secessionist, tendencies should include a periodic assessment of the « Balance of Power », without neglecting the notions of « areas of responsibilities » or « special interests », whose existence and reality are indisputable both in the East and West, moving the European centre of gravity to the « Land der Mitte » and to Poland. The objective of the Union materialised at the strategic level by stabilisation measures within the new member States and by pre-accession, association or neighbourhood agreements, for non-member States, which are not destined to join the Union. With the enlargement of the European Union, two different approaches came into conflict : the « globalisation », or « multilateral governance », and therefore the triple formal democracy, human rights and global market, and the « Balance of Power », based on the power equilibrium and on the multipolar morphology of the international system. Therefore, the European aspect of conflict management, particularly in Ukraine, in Syria, in the Caucasus and in the Mediterranean, is not supported by a « comprehensive and global security » vision, including the « third parties interested » (Russia), who are stakeholders of crisis actions. It is now time for the European Union to deduct the regional policy of a global policy and to move from the understanding of interests during conflict to the definition of its “own interest” and of its own sphere of influence. Overall, the mentioned areas draw an area of vital interest for the European Union, directly affecting its ability to become a global actor on the world stage. Since the dominant geopolitical paradigm of the 21st century will be Eurasia, and since this new paradigm already determines the foreign, security and defence policies of the major world powers, the United States, Russia and China also dictate the conducting of the average regional powers as Turkey or Iran, the European Union can not have a policy or a regional strategy “in the true sense of the word” in Ukraine, in Syria, in the Caucasus and in the Mediterranean, as geopolitical borders of a multipolar world. Indeed, there is a lack of unifying and global geopolitical paradigm for Eurasia, as a crucial strategic hub of the 21st century. By adopting this paradigm, developed by the Russian Federation as the « Eurasian Project », Europe has to think about itself as a «Global Balance » between the East and the West, which would enable Europe to provide a framework and to unify the different regional strategies. Indeed, the European Union's global interest is :

- to avoid a « coalition of the Heartland » in Eurasia, intending to bring the continental powers together as an anti-Western function, to maintain the geopolitical pluralism and not only the democratical one.

- To make sure that not any power would control or exclusively dominate the « geographical Pivot of History » (Ukraine, Caucasus, Middle-East, Great Middle-East and Western Mediterranean).
  - To prevent the « Middle Kingdom» from replacing Russia in Western Siberia by an irresistible demographic pressure. From this perspective the land of Chung Kuô could add an oceanic front and an offensive maritime strategy, holding resources from its inland, by expanding the potential influence sphere of China in the South-China Sea and in the Pacific. In this situation of moving asymmetries, are the Mediterranean, Central European and Middle-Eastern civil societies able to influence the geopolitical choices taken by their governments, by violence, revolt or even destabilisation ?
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**UKRAINE-SYRIA :**  
**TWO FACES OF THE GEOPOLITICAL RUSSIAN GAME**

Jacques LIPPERT

**SOURCES OF THE CONFLICTUALITY**

In both crisis we find some common layers at three levels. First of all, these are national crisis. In Syria, the rebels (national opposition) challenge the Baath party in a Arab Spring style demonstration before the arrival of islamist brigades. In Ukraine, the Western part challenges the government's move towards the Russian alliance instead of the EU membership. In both cases the risk exists of a disintegration of the State and the Nation itself, with unpredictable side effects on the neighbouring countries. The second stage is the intervention effective or potential of regional powers, like Iran and Saudi Arabia, Israel or Turkey. These Powers are driven by the struggle for the control of resources like water (the Golan, vital for Israel ) or oil transportation in the area, but also by the struggle for ideological and territorial hegemony, either shia or sunni opposing Iran, Syria and the Hezbollah on one side (the Shia Crescent) and Saudi Arabia, Al Qaida and affiliates on the other side, both manipulating radical movements on the field in Syria transforming the original uprising into a civil war, comparable to the Spanish civil war. In Ukraine there is the risk of « balkanisation » or partition of the country on a national/ethnic basis like in Georgia. The third stage is the interference of external powers : the EU pursuing its enlargement policy in Ukraine and anxious about the radical islamist expansion in the Mediterranean area of the Near East ; the US

redrafting its Arabian and Iranian policies ; Russia consolidating its come back in the Near and Far East, while regaining its influence on its borders in the Caucasus area which directly conflicts with the enlargement policy of the EU. In other terms a political border matter. At the same time Russia is proposing the EU a security treaty which may one day form the « *World Island* »(Mc Kinder), a geopolitical project for the Russian diplomacy

## **GLOBALISATION**

There are two ways by which a national/regional conflict could « globalise » :

- the globalisation of some local geographic areas like the Golan, the straits of Ormuz or of Malacca, generally all places the « *GREAT POWERS* » consider as vital for their security, their expansion or the security of their Allies - i.e for Russia : Syria, Iran, the Caucasus or for the US : Israel , Japan, Taiwan. No way out of the conflict without their consent and the « legalisation » of a new agreement is endorsed by the UN afterwards. The control of geostrategical area reinforces.
- the globalisation of the winning Power. If we consider that the US are the only worldwide global power since 1991 with access to any place in the world (Air force, Navy, NSA), their only real challenger today is Russia through the Syrian and Ukrainian crisis in which Putin took and won the diplomatic initiative. The message behind this Russian come-back is quite clear: as for now, no major international crisis will find a solution without Russia, unless endangering the World peace. The time of solving international issues by preemptive wars and Western « *Coalitions of the willing* » is over and is to be replaced by diplomatic « *Coalitions of the Willing* » in which Russia should play a central role. This was clearly demonstrated by the pressure that Russia only could put on Syria and Iran to obtain concessions from them and moderate their aggressiveness. In Ukraine President Putin didn't hesitate to act more brutally by creating the crisis, in order to remind the idealistic EU that this country is part of the Russian influence area. With this « strategic surprise » going frontally against the EU enlargement diplomacy and the CIA manoeuvres, President Putin demonstrated clearly the inability of the Union playing as a Sovereign State and the limits of the US influence in this area.

## **SOVEREIGNTY**

Both crisis show the emergence of a new paradigm in international law: conditionnal security and conditional sovereignty vs the classical theory of absolut sovereignty of the State (2005, Zоргbibe). The post-September-11th diplomacy endorsed the new doctrine (the Quartet with the road-map

imposes 2 conditions to the emergence of a Palestinian State). Apart this consensus, the interpretation differs when the « praxis » is at stake. For the Westerners it is impregnated with idealism, parliamentary democracy, human rights, free trade, etc – which doesn't prevent the US of more cynical actions in Latin America, or the introduction of deregulated capitalism in Russia. For Russia, conditional sovereignty applied to Georgia and Ukraine reminds the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty, soft version. Concerning Syria today, the legitimacy of the Syrian State in the Geneva talks is no more challenged, but tough conditions are required in exchange while Russia succeeded concerning the chemical weapons affair. In Ukraine the Russian offer destabilised the Executive power - President and government - and splitted the Nation into two camps at a point that its future is doubtful, unless a « coup d'État » changes the deal.

### **INTERNATIONAL ANARCHY AGAIN ?**

Concerning the Iranian Revolution, the Near East and Ukrainian crisis the global situation is as volatile and confuse as it was in 1914 and 1939. We may only draw some provisionnal conclusions . 1st :The USA remains the central Nation, although the Obama foreign policy is in redefinition between the Western, Near Eastern and Pacific interests, it is also affected by hesitation, as they recover their energetic independance. 2<sup>ND</sup> : The EU appears weaker as ever due to the lack of a strategic vision and policy, especially regarding Russia. Germany, France and Great Britain follow their own interests in the Near East. 3d :The new aspect is the come back of Russia with a vigorous diplomacy in the Near East and the Caucasus. By playing these two games at a time Russia emerges as the new essential Nation. At the opposite of the secular Western World, mainly Europe, Putin believes that the Orthodoxy is a strong cultural and spiritual link for his Nation. History becomes another one when he takes into account the legacy of the double heritage of the Tsarism and of the Great Patriotic War. Rallying Ukraine, Georgia and maybe others like moderate muslim States to Russia is also comforting Russia in its struggle against radical islamism. By challenging both the US supremacy and the would-be power of the EU Putin is not aiming at a new Cold War, but at a new bipolarity – a new « Balance of Power » - with the US, keeping China at a distance of a second rank Power, while sharing the Eurasian security architecture with the EU. If such a strategic vision succeeds, it could mean peace, security and stability from Washington to Brussels and Moscow, avoiding the international anarchy, but democracy In Ukraine may well pay the bill. This crisis is a turning point.

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## **THE MISTRUST ABOUT THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP**

Pierre-Emmanuel THOMANN

The political crisis in Ukraine threatens the strategic relationship not only between UE and Ukraine, but also between EU and Russia. Deep mistrust between Russia and European Union derives from the Eastern Partnership finality. According to a cable revealed from WIKILEAKS<sup>1</sup>, the Eastern Partnership “*aims to counter a resurgent Russia*” by having a “*pro-western buffer zone*”. “*The prospect of free trade zone and visa-free travel to the EU, the Eastern Partnership can spur the reforms needed for eventual membership and stem growing Russian influence*”. The Eastern Partnership would “*energize EU engagement with eastern neighbors in the face of enlargement fatigue*”. The Eastern Partnership has also the support of the United States as they look “*for ways to enhance western influence beyond NATO's eastern borders*”. The cable proves that Eastern Partnership finality, UE enlargement and finally NATO interests are strongly intertwined, and this can only enhance mistrust from the Russian side and pro-Russian populations within Ukraine.

### **THE INTEREST OF THE EU AND UKRAINE**

If the EU still harbours the strategic ambition to build a European political identity, it must be able independently to identify and defend its interests in the multipolar world that is taking shape. A realistic analysis of its interests suggests the following principle: Renunciation of the enlargement of the EU and the Atlantic Alliance into Russia's ‘near abroad’ is the way to increase regional stability and improve relations with Russia. With stable frontiers, the EU would put an end to its dilution, which is growing with successive enlargements. Its internal cohesion and also its identity, which is crucial for popular support, would be strengthened by this.

With enlargement to Ukraine, the EU would find itself facing the identity question between Russia and Ukraine. The pursuit of enlargement is today causing the EU to import the geopolitical fault-lines resulting from the historical frontiers which mark the Eurasian continent. This weakens the EU's coherence and identity and increases the risks of dilution. Leaving aside the Balkans, the negotiation of political alternatives to the prospect of enlargement would provide the occasion for

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1 <http://wikileaks.org/>

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the EU to fix its frontiers in order to preserve its cohesion, to strengthen its identity and facilitate the identification of its interests. Membership of the Atlantic Alliance has hitherto filled the role of ‘anteroom’ to the EU. The freezing of the Atlantic Alliance’s enlargement to Ukraine also enables the EU’s own project there to be halted. It is in the Union’s interest to reduce Russia’s perception of encirclement. A deepening of relations with Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia can only last if Russia’s interests in the European puzzle are taken into account. Relations between Ukraine and the EU could be oriented in the direction of a ‘bridge’ rather than a ‘front’ against Russia. Russia firmly intends to remain a powerful geopolitical pole. It holds one of the keys to security on the European continent and will remain a major energy supplier to the EU whatever form diversification may take. An energy, industrial and political alliance with Russia is in the interest of the EU in extending its hinterland towards ‘Euro- Siberia’. In the end, ambivalence about the prospect of EU enlargement to Ukraine can only foster mistrust between EU Members States themselves and modify the geopolitical balance between France and Germany within EU with a transfer of the center of geopolitical gravity of the European project to the East, at the expense of EU Southern Member States.

#### **REFORMULATION OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP**

The Eastern Partnership needs therefore to be reformulated to remove distrust from the Ukrainian and Russian side. A three-way negotiation between EU, Ukraine and Russia is the best formula for success. In parallel to a reformulation of the Eastern Partnership, the negotiation of a new Eurasian security architecture preserving Russia’s security interests would facilitate the stabilization of the EU’s continental hinterland. It would also be a favorable opportunity for the EU to make itself a centre of equilibrium alongside Russia which would constitute a useful counter-weight against other global powers.

Brussels, 5th of February 2014