

CONNECTIONS

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Common European Security and Defense Policy: Horizons of the Russian Perception

*Vladimir Baranovsky*¹

“We note with satisfaction the progress achieved in the common European security and defense policy.” This remarkable sentence was in the text of the joint communiqué summarizing the results of the European Union- Russia Summit held on October 30, 2000 in Paris.² Vladimir Putin’s signature on the document meant that Russia, for the first time, officially and at the highest political level, expressed its positive view of this new and fast-growing dimension within the European Union. For this development in the state of European security policy, Russia has adopted the somewhat inelegant abbreviation “•••••” (CESDP) for the Common European Security and Defense Policy. Russia’s welcome should be seen as something more important than just a routine diplomatic formula. In Russian political perceptions, satisfaction with regard to CESDP is by no means self-evident, certain or alternative-free.

The problem of how to deal with CESDP is a mirror reflection of some of Russia’s key dilemmas in foreign policy, closely related to the difficult process of searching for its national identity. What foreign policy benchmarks should guide it, and what criteria should be used to select them? How does the new Russia fit in the changing global scene? How can Russia secure a worthy place in the international arena—and what does this notion of “worthy place” actually mean? All these questions are still very much at the core of the ongoing conceptual debates in Russia. And the issue of CESDP—how it fits the overall policy context and relates to the real or eventual interests of Russia—makes those debates all the more challenging.

It is helpful and useful to look at this problem from a historical perspective. During the Soviet era, when discussions would flare up on the issue of western military and political integration, two opposing views were usually expressed. Or, to be correct, three views, the first being that it was a totally senseless discussion since there was not any truly European military and political integration. The remaining two perceptions, however, were based on logical premises that were directly at odds with each other.

One of them stated that an evolving or eventual military and political integration, either within the framework of or on the basis of the European Community (the forerunner of today’s European Union), was nothing else but a consolidation of NATO’s

¹ Vladimir Baranovsky is the Deputy Director for the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences.

² The joint communiqué was signed by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, and the Chairman of the European Council, Jacques Chirac, assisted by the Secretary-General of the Council/High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, Mr. J. Solana, and by the President of the Commission of the European Communities, Mr. R. Prodi.

European base. That logic was almost genetically linked to a wary and hostile attitude towards the phenomenon of integration in the western part of the continent as a means of strengthening the position of the West in its struggle against the USSR in particular and world of socialism more broadly.

The struggle was spearheaded by the United States and the American-controlled NATO. The underlying thesis of traditionally hostile attitudes towards the European Community, simply put, held that the EC was NATO's economic power base in Europe. Consequently, any attempt at military and political integration within that entity would have meant creating additional military possibilities for NATO and the United States. Insofar as NATO was the embodiment of everything that was seen as evil and under hostile American "guidance," any signs of Western European integration gravitating towards military and political union, or even simple discussions on the subject, could not help but provoke an extremely negative reaction from Moscow. Even when the perception of integration processes in Western Europe slowly started to change, it primarily related to the economic side of the phenomenon. Soviet analysts began to highlight that objective aspect of the project and, for that time (the 1960s), it was a genuine breakthrough in terms of intellectual conceptualization of the integration process. However, it was only in the era of Gorbachev that the European Community was finally recognized as a political entity and actor. At the same time, this "new political thinking" did not go as far as it could have in recognizing the military and political aspects of European integration because, in part, at that time the issue itself was very vague; it was viewed more as an area of potential development rather than something tangible and feasible.

The second view of these military and political integration processes stems from quite different conceptual origins. It emerged from the framework of two post-Stalinist Soviet theories of international relations: peaceful coexistence and intra-imperialistic contradictions. The theory of peaceful coexistence aimed at engaging the countries of the so-called socialist camp in constructive cooperation with the West, while the second model presupposed that the West should not necessarily be viewed as a single consolidated whole. The overlapping of these two paradigms brought about a relatively logical and well-knit postulate: a negative attitude towards NATO should not necessarily have the same kind of negative impact on eventual military and political integration within European parameters. Namely, this theory held that such integration tendencies were the result of deepening contradictions between the United States and Europe. As such, they represented the erosion of NATO's solidarity and a challenge to American domination in the military and political sphere. Thus, from this point of view of Soviet military, political, and foreign policy interests, these gestures toward integration in Europe were probably not such a bad thing. It should be noted here that such a view was unquestionably a marginal one. At that time the dominant thinking held that it was very unlikely for the existing contradictions between the Americans and Europeans to spread to the military and political arena; that those contradictions were mostly latent in their

nature; and that, in any case, they were not that significant compared with the major differences between East and West which would eventually cancel them out.

This basic intellectual structure underlying Moscow's past perceptions of the military dimension of Western European integration should be always kept in mind. Ironically, much of that ideology is still present today in Russian political thinking. Moscow's attitude toward military and political processes within the European Union remains an explicit function of its attitude towards NATO; this is the unvarying paradigm that has survived the collapse of the Soviet Union. It manifested itself at the beginning of the 1990s, when many in Russia were in a state of euphoria about the prospects of strategic partnership with the West and temporarily abandoned their wary and watchful attitude towards NATO. At that time, Moscow did not react in any way to attempts to intensify the movement toward military and political cooperation in Western Europe. For instance, everything that related to the creation of Eurocorps or efforts to reanimate the Western European Union (WEU) were viewed as not worthy of attention. But things did not stand still; NATO enlargement has had an important effect. The comprehensive paradigm of Russian attitudes toward NATO has changed as a result of the decision to enlarge the organization. Moscow's extremely negative reaction to the idea of NATO's eastward expansion was not the only result of that decision. There are serious grounds for believing that it was precisely because of NATO's drive eastward that Russia adopted a benevolent attitude towards the European Union's own enlargement project, viewing it as an alternative project.

The same can be said about the military and political aspects of integration. One need only compare the wary attitude toward the WEU in the Soviet era with the heightened interest it generated in the mid-1990s. This interest was clearly unilateral, and it reached its peak exactly when the campaign against NATO's enlargement was in full swing. Russian politicians and analysts cajoled the candidate countries to join WEU, hoping that it would make them change their mind about becoming part of NATO. More than that, when the three Baltic states were accorded an associated partnership status within the WEU, Moscow did not react at all (unlike the deep anxiety that it manifests whenever the possibility of the Baltic states joining NATO is mentioned, while at the same time completely ignoring the fact that the mutual military assistance provisions under Article 5 of the Brussels Treaty are much tougher than similar provisions in the North Atlantic Treaty).

All this can logically lead to only one conclusion—as was the case before, Moscow still makes the contradistinction between “Atlantic” and “European” military and political cooperation the cornerstone of its policy. Sometimes this contradistinction is openly highlighted as almost an official position, but more often than not it manifest itself at the subconscious level due to its pervasiveness in political discussion and analytical theory. It is interesting to note that the political and conceptual issues that are concurrently being debated are basically the same as in the earlier era. It should be also added here that many of them are surprisingly similar to those debated by western analysts and politicians when they discuss CESDP.

Occasionally, these discussions give rise to clearly exaggerated notions of what CESDP's objectives are and what it would look like in the foreseeable future. In such cases, the lack of knowledge in Russia about the real state of affairs in Europe summons up an image of a "single Europe" about to acquire a full-fledged military mechanism. Generally speaking, few in Russia realize that the primary focus of the CESDP is on creating crisis management instruments to implement the so-called Petersberg missions, rather than carrying out a full-scale "European army" project and moving from national to "European" means of ensuring military security. Sometimes, however, the argument goes the other way, and the traditional skepticism based on half a century of monitoring European integration gains the upper hand. The question is asked: How serious is all this integration, and may it not be "much ado about nothing"? In particular, with regard to this analysis, it is absolutely clear that there is a long way to go from common policy to common defense, which, by the way, might never be covered under CESDP.

However, there is another, even greater uncertainty relating to the correlation of the EU's military dimension with that of NATO and how Russia should view this dilemma. As was the case before, one can easily foresee the emergence of two camps here: a camp of European enthusiasts and a camp of alarmists. The former would talk about creating a military and political potential, which would have a certain measure of independence from the United States and NATO and could mean a big advantage for Russia.³ It would be especially attractive for those who still have the old Soviet allergy towards NATO or who acquired one because of events in Kosovo. But the alarmists, those who put a strong emphasis on very close and continuing links between CESDP and NATO, would disagree with them, seeing strong disadvantages for Russia.

European enthusiasts would logically favor the establishment and development of relations with the fledgling military structures of the EU, believing that they would push NATO to the background. The so-called alarmists would probably view these attempts with skepticism. Or they would try to make the possibility of Russia's cooperation with those structures conditional on CESDP's radical break from NATO. Senior officials within the Russian military establishment are disarmingly candid about their position. They say, in effect: We stand for cooperation with CESDP but not with the one which

³ The Speaker of the State Duma, Gennadyi Seleznev, writes: "With the collapse of the Soviet Union the world had basically turned into a single polar world, the balance of power and influence on our planet had shifted to one single pole which is not only unfair but just plain dangerous for mankind. Under these circumstances one can understand the search by many small states for some counterbalances. The EU's ambitious desire to create another pole of global importance which would stand out not only by its economic clout but by having global and regional components of influence is understandable and justified." See Guennadyi Seleznev, "Cinderella in Europe. How long Russia has to stay in this role?" in *Europe* (magazine of the European Union published in Moscow), 5 November 2000, 9.

has been formulated so far, because we are against the EU's security forces becoming "an appendix to NATO's military machine."⁴

However, there may be an interesting new element at work here. Those who politically or intellectually stand for the prioritization of Russia's relations with NATO and the United States may explicitly or implicitly oppose Russia's interaction with the EU in the area of CESDP. For them, such a move would mean favoring the development of military and political relations with the EU, and so distort Russian priorities by siding against NATO and the United States. This logic is likely to be shared only by hawks from the ministry of defense or general staff, as well as by anti-American and anti-NATO "civilian strategists." As a result, we have an amusing and paradoxical situation—we can see both red-hot anti-NATO people and passionate pro-NATO activists in one and the same camp. One cannot help but notice the extreme polarity of arguments and motives: in the case of the former, cooperation with "common European security and defense policy" is rejected due to its complete "subordination" to NATO while, in the case of the latter, potential Russian cooperation is viewed as leading Russian policy astray from what should be its major direction.

One can assume with a fairly large measure of certainty that the supporters of Russian military and political cooperation with the EU, guided primarily (if not exclusively) by anti-NATO, anti-American logic, are bound to be somewhat disappointed. If Moscow vigorously starts to offer itself to the EU as a contracting party for CESDP, stressing—as it has already been done several of times by Yeltsin—that the Europeans should be dealing with their affairs themselves, the effect would be directly opposite to those intended. Instead of attracting the Europeans, Moscow would scare them off. Even without Russia, the EU member countries will have a lot of trouble to deal with because the United States has demonstrated a higher-than-usual nervousness about CESDP and use every opportunity to remind others that the EU's military dimension should be shaped only within the framework of the Atlantic system and through close cooperation with it. This is one of the major priorities for the Europeans—to remove the U.S. concern that CESDP may weaken or marginalize NATO. To emphasize Russian support for CESDP would be like pouring fuel onto the fire, and would make the EU extra cautious about the idea of partnership with Russia.

It is worth pointing out that many of the questions being asked by Russians in this area are the same as those Europeans are asking themselves. Crisis management is a case in point. Where does the EU intend to use the crisis management mechanism it is presently developing? It is clear that the first and obvious choice would be the Balkans, in case the instability there persists or becomes even greater. But what else will be within CESDP's scope? If it is deployed in Nagorny Karabakh, Abkhazia or the

⁴ Conference on the EU and Russia held in Moscow on February 15, 2001 (with the participation of High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten, and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Anna Lindth). Also see 16.2.2001,.3.

Transdniester area (but never in Northern Ireland, the Basque country, or Corsica), would it not mean that the set of instruments being developed now will be exclusively (or mainly) oriented toward post-Soviet geopolitical space? If so, then many in Russia would have the impression that Russia is being squeezed out of the regions vital to its national interests, and this impression, on top of everything else, would be directly linked to CESDP.

There is yet another issue that may arise for Russia in relation to the EU's military dimension—its impact on the nature and scale of military preparations. For the EU to acquire an independent military capability, the scale of military preparations within the Union would need to be significantly larger, given the geostrategic potential of the Union. Following this argument, Europe should restructure its military capability in earnest, and spend more on purchasing modern military hardware (so as not to find itself in a situation similar to Kosovo, where Europe's participation was little more than modest—the U.S. Air Force accounted for 80 percent of all combat sorties). The proposed intensification of military preparations in the EU countries may be taken by Russia as a disturbing sign, especially against the backdrop of uncertainties about how these ever-increasing capabilities are going to be used.

Under these circumstances, alarmist perceptions could acquire almost hysterical proportions. According to this logic, CESDP might be even more dangerous than NATO. Even if we take our mind off such extreme points of view, the question of CESDP's long-term prospects still remains.⁵ There may be wide-ranging views on this point in Russia. To make things simpler, the question may be formulated in the following way: Could a militarily strong "single Europe," even independent in its decisions from the United States, pose the same political challenge to Russia that NATO was seen to offer during the Soviet era? Or could it turn into the same existential challenge as that posed by China?

It is clear that all these theoretical speculations can vary significantly. That is why some politicians in Russia think that it would be prudent to wait until things clear up and not to be in a rush to define their position. There is another point of view, however, holding that Russia should intensify its efforts to be involved in CESDP, and that it should act quickly while the policy and its modus operandi are still being shaped, because when this process is over, and the rules of the game have been set, it will be very difficult to change them.

Perhaps this approach contains a somewhat exaggerated notion of Russia's capabilities to have leverage in the process of shaping a "common European security and defense policy." However, it is important to stress here a principled orientation on cooperative interaction between Russia and CESDP, namely, that this orientation should

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be put outside Russia's negative complexes concerning its relations with NATO.⁶ It should be also recognized that, under the present circumstances, military and political cooperation with the EU is simply not feasible without restoring relations with NATO, and even less so, when this cooperation is presented as an antithesis to it. But, given the right circumstances, such cooperation may prove to be quite worthwhile for both parties. Russia could offer its European partners something quite tangible and attractive—for instance, the possibility to use its military transport aircraft in addressing the tasks defined by CESDP. In this context, joint implementation of the same Petersberg missions by Russia and the European Union would not be an impossible thing to accomplish.

In a larger context, such cooperation would be the best guarantee against the long-standing suspicions, mistrust and concerns mentioned above. Russia's involvement in the system of military and political relations in Europe, presently being shaped around and on the basis of the EU, is more important than the cultivation of the somewhat flimsy image of a "common European architecture." Here we should recall once again the importance of the principled decision on that subject taken at the political level—this is how one should view the results of the EU-Russia summit in Paris (where, in addition to other documents, a special declaration "on strengthening the dialogue and cooperation on political and European security issues" was signed). However, if everything boils down only to political solutions, the idea will soon be diluted and even become discredited. It is important to give it substance, to fill it in with specific content, defining feasible objectives, practical tasks, institutional mechanisms, and organizational forms of potential interaction between Russia and the EU in this area. Specific issues should now be concentrated upon, precisely because in identifying these, progress at the higher levels can be achieved.

⁶ It looks like the official policy of Russia is evolving exactly in this direction. For instance, "The medium-term strategy for advancing EU-Russia relations during the period 2000-2010" officially presented by Mr. Putin at the EU-Russia summit held in October 2000 in Helsinki contains a provision that the cooperation with the EU in the area of security "could become, inter alia, a counterbalance to NATO's centrism in Europe." A year later, at the above-mentioned EU-Russia summit in Paris, the Russian president did not even mention the issue. At any rate, it was already absent in the Concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, adopted in June of 2000. The concept just impassively stated that the EU's evolving military and political dimensions "should become the subject of special attention."

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