



Sad delusions: The decline and rise of Greater Europe

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War was accompanied by the idea that the fall of the Berlin Wall represented the beginning of the unification of Europe. Mikhail Gorbachev talked in terms of a “Common European Home,” an idea that continues in the guise of the project for a “Greater Europe.” However, right from the start, the transformative idea of Greater Europe was countered by the notion of “Europe whole and free,” whose fundamental dynamic was the enlargement of the existing West European order to encompass the rest of the continent. This was a program for the enlargement of the Atlantic system. After some prevarication, the enlargement agenda proved unacceptable to Moscow, and while it continues to argue in favor of transformation its main efforts are now devoted to creating some sort of “greater Eurasia.” There remains a fundamental tension between Atlanticist and pan-continental version of the post–Cold War international order in the region. This tension gave rise to conflict and war: in 2008 (the Russo-Georgian War) and again from 2014 (Ukraine), and to what some call the Second Cold War. The continent is once again divided. However, pan-continentalism is far from dead, and although Greater Eurasian ideas have thrived, some sort of Greater European continentalism remains on the agenda. Is this, though, no more than a “sad delusion” or a genuine possibility?

Keywords

Cold War, Common European home, Greater Eurasia, Greater Europe, Putin, Russia, the West

In recent years, there has been much talk of the return of a bipolar structure to international order, with the dominance of the United States challenged by the emergence of a peer competitor in the form of China.¹ At the same time, Russia argues that the world is becoming increasingly multipolar, with a number of centers of global power but none capable of hegemonic dominance. These discussions reflect two important points. The first is the relative decline of Europe as an independent actor in international politics. The second is Russia’s attempt to provide a conceptual framework for its own assertion of great power status and independence from the emerging elements of bipolarity.

To achieve this independence, Russia pursues a three-fold strategy. The first in chronological terms is the program outlined in the last Soviet period and enunciated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the formulation of a “Common European Home.” After the relative quiescence of this notion in the 1990s, it was revived by President Vladimir Putin in the form of the idea of “Greater Europe.” This reprised classical Gaullist-Mitterrandist ideas about some sort of European political community stretching from

Lisbon to Vladivostok. The second is the development of Eurasian integration in post-Soviet Eurasia (PSE). This includes fostering the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as part of what can be called Putin’s “heartland” strategy, to avoid PSE becoming a zone of contestation between stronger outside powers. This is in keeping with the pragmatic Eurasianism advanced above all by Nursultan Nazarbayev (1994), the president of Kazakhstan between 1991 and 2019, who can claim to be the progenitor of Eurasian integration through his famous speech at Moscow State University in 1994. Nazarbayev did not favor the restoration of anything approximating the USSR because “Far

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from promoting the restoration of the USSR, Eurasianism stands in active opposition. . . . For segments of the elite in many post-Soviet countries, Eurasianism has a coherence that neither overpowers nor assimilates distinctive ethnic groups” (Podberezkin & Podberezkina, 2015, pp. 48–49). The third approach is to tie both of these into a larger Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), reinforced by a number of post-Western global institutions, notably the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The parameters and geographical scope of GEP remain vague, yet the ambition is clear: to ensure that Russia remains the center of global politics and to move beyond a West-centric political imaginary to sustain a new geopolitics of diversity and sovereign internationalism.

At the same time, a potential return to pan-European continentalism cannot be precluded. Atlantic unity frayed in the Donald Trump era, but his actions reflected long-term trends. This renewed the idea of some sort of pan-continental project, no longer couched in terms of an alternative to Russia’s Eurasian and Asian ambitions but as a complement. The continued commitment to some sort of Greater European idea returns to earlier Gorbachevian themes, but is it little more than a revival of the “sad delusions” of that era—the belief that European international politics could be so transformed as to allow a genuine post-Cold War system of indivisible and mutual security based on the joint interests of a common European destiny? The paper will argue that a more modest conception of this “Greater Europe” is not delusional but in fact represents a sensible policy strategy for all concerned in conditions of renewed great power rivalry, but it will only be viable if couched in terms of something more sustainable than multivectorism and balancing but on a common commitment to sovereign internationalism to allow competitive but creative competition with Atlantic and Asian powers.

From Common European Home to Greater Europe

At the end of the Cold War in 1989, Europe was faced with two potential pathways into the post-communist era (Sakwa, 2017b). The first was outlined by Gorbachev (1988) for a continent in which a plurality of social systems coexisted without necessarily coming into conflict. In his speech to the United Nations on 7 December 1988, Gorbachev effectively declared the Cold War over. He argued that “Further world progress is now possible only through the search for a consensus of all mankind, in movement toward a new world order.” In his speech to the Council of Europe (CoE) in Strasbourg on 6 July 1989, Gorbachev (1989) spoke of a “common European home” stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, thus giving voice to the aspiration for pan-European unity that remains to this day in the guise of “Greater Europe.” The tumultuous

events of 1989 were a consequence of this fundamental policy shift.

Two paths out of the Cold War

The New Political Thinking (NPT) was a type of “universal ideology” for a global world, with the potential to revive the United Nations, for so long overshadowed by Cold War bloc politics. Gorbachev’s grand project was to integrate “the Soviet Union as an equal partner of the Western powers in the world’s political family” (Grachev, 2008, pp. 78, 194–194, 204). Even as he dismantled the Cold War, Gorbachev remained committed to creating a “humane, democratic socialism” in the Soviet Union. For him, the transcendence of the Cold War did not mean that the Soviet Union would automatically copy the political system of the West (Gooding, 1990; Robinson, 1995). Equally, for him and his successors, Russia would remain an independent sovereign power in international affairs, but now acting in a more cooperative spirit. This would mean joining a new and transformed Greater West, the global counterpart of Greater Europe. At the core of the transformational politics outlined at this time was a new peace order based on the reunification of the European continent. Despite Russia’s travails in the 1990s, this vision of a united but plural Europe remains, even though relations between Russia and the European Union (EU) after 2014 entered an impasse from which there is no clear exit.

It is worth recalling the pluralistic vision at the heart of policy during perestroika. Gorbachev’s (1989) common European home speech warned that “the states of Europe belong to different social systems” and admitted that there was uncertainty about the new “architecture of our ‘common home,’” but insisted that it would have many rooms. This was a model for an ideationally plural Europe comprised of several sovereign entities. This was a classic Gaullist idea, taken up by François Mitterrand in his plan for a “European confederation” and by many others and above all the Russian ambition (it would be going too far to call it a plan) for a Greater Europe. However, on the other side, President George H.W. Bush sought to regain the ideological initiative by advancing the idea of a “new world order” based on enlargement rather than transformation, first enunciated in his September 1990 address to Congress. In practice, both sides in the early post-Cold War years were committed to a middle position, the policy of adaptation of the European political and security architecture to a Russia that itself was committed to adaptation. The Charter of Paris for a New Europe (1990) of 21 November 1990 heralded “a new era of democracy, peace and unity,” stressing that “Europe is liberating itself from its past.” The focus was on the temporal challenge—overcoming the past, but the contours of the new spatial order were unclear.

Although idealistic, Gorbachev’s ideas were responses to real challenges that remain unresolved to this day. Putin’s

foreign policy later was formulated in more pragmatic terms, but it retained the idealistic streak inherited from the perestroika years. The end of the Cold War was but part of the transformation of the international system. Equally, 1989 was not just about achieving a counter-revolution against the ossified dogmas and social practices of Soviet-style socialism, but the underlying aspiration was to achieve an emancipation from axiological politics in their entirety through “anti-revolutions” (Sakwa, 1998, 2001). This represented the positive transcendence of the Cold War through a transformation of international politics. Instead, one form of axiology was replaced by another, and the philosophical closure represented by the “end of history” (the view that the dissolution of communist system represented the end of the ideological evolution of humanity) was accompanied by the inadvertent “end of politics.” Certain issues were considered closed and not susceptible to revision. The fundamental process in the Russian view was to be mutual *transformation*, whereas the Western view envisaged a straightforward process of *enlargement* (Sakwa, 2017b, pp. 12–19). The end of the Cold War saw no fundamental institutional innovation when it came to European security and development, and instead the Atlantic power system (the EU and NATO) enlarged. Institutional enlargement was accompanied by a complex process of norm advancement in which a strengthened monistic system claimed the title to virtue and values. This is how, according to Andrew Bacevich (2020), “America squandered its Cold War victory.”

Russia was offered not a Greater West but membership of the Historical West, and even that apparently on subordinate terms. Russia in one way or another has been striving to be recognized as founder member of the Historical West since at least the early modern era, but always as a shaper rather than a simple taker of norms, provoking endless conflicts that endure to this day (Neumann, 2016). There appeared to be “no place for Russia” in the triumphant Atlantic system, certainly not as an equal (Hill, 2018). Given the enormous disparity in power and resources, Russia’s effective exclusion from the existing security arrangements did not at first appear to be a problem, but in the end Russia was once again “lost” (Conradi, 2017). Jack Matlock, the U.S. ambassador to the USSR between 1987 and 1991, notes, “too many American politicians looked at the end of the Cold War as if it were a quasi-military victory rather than a negotiated outcome that benefited both sides” (Matlock, 2010, p. x). He notes that “mythmaking began almost as soon as the Soviet Union fell”; “Since 1991, these distortions have created a set of beliefs as widespread as they are unfounded” (Matlock, 2010, p. 3). He argues that the Cold War ended at least 2 years before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and that it was Gorbachev’s initiatives and not western military pressure that “defeated communism.” Thus, he rejects the increasingly prevalent view that it was the U.S. president, Ronald Reagan, who put an end

to the Cold War by standing firm and who through the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, more commonly known as Star Wars) who forced the Soviet Union to surrender.

This is the fundamental point about Russia’s claim to be a co-founder of the post-Cold War European and global order. Russia (as the continuer state of the Soviet Union) argues that it was not defeated in the Cold War, but that it was a common victory (Matlock, 2010, pp. 4–6). The point is confirmed by Stephen Cohen, who argues that “the Cold War would have continued unabated, possibly grown worse, had it not been for Gorbachev’s initiatives.” He also notes that the Cold War ended well before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and as Bush had originally argued, it was negotiated so that “there were no losers, only winners” (Cohen, 2009, p. 160). However, “the Cold War ended in Moscow, but not in Washington” (Cohen, 2009, p. 171), creating a unipolar peace order against which Moscow chafed from the start. The post-Soviet peace was “lost,” and contrary to much Western commentary, “The new Cold War and the squandering of the post-Soviet peace began not in Moscow but in Washington” (Cohen, 2009, p. 167). NATO enlargement meant that most of the “follies” of the (George W.) Bush administration had their roots in the mistakes of the (Bill) Clinton presidency in the 1990s (Cohen, 2009, p. 172). Cohen (2017) believes that the new Cold War is largely the responsibility of the Western powers, who failed to overcome the entrenched patterns of the original conflict.

On the other side, leaders of the Atlantic community feared that premature Russian membership of the Historical West would lead to normative dilution, institutional incoherence and the loss of American leadership. Offensive realists argue that one of the main priorities for a regional hegemon (in this case the United States) is not to allow any potential rival to emerge elsewhere (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp. 21, 141 and *passim*). Mearsheimer (2014, p. xv) takes it as a given that Russia is a great power, although one today with a relatively low power capacity. In his view, the cycle of violence will continue, “because the great powers that shape the international system fear each other and compete for power as a result.” In an anarchic international system (i.e., one without some sort of supreme authority), security competition and war between the great powers remain constants, although the intensity of competition varies. States seek to maximize their share of world power, and aim to become the hegemon—“the only great power in the system” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 2). Regime type (today either self-styled democracies or “autocracies”) has little to do with it because “democracies care about security as much as non-democracies do” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 4). The structure of the international system shapes the behavior of states. This is in sharp contrast to the liberal view, which believes that the domestic characteristics of states shape their foreign policy. Defensive (or structural) realists also believe that states are concerned about the balance of power

as they struggle to survive, but unlike offensive realists, states behave defensively to maintain rather than to challenge the balance of power and form balancing coalitions to counter a potential hegemon (Waltz, 1979). It is from this perspective that Wohlforth and Zubok (2017) argue that the idea of any transformational politics at the end of the Cold War is hopelessly delusional. However, their perspective is global, whereas post-war European regional politics are based precisely on the possibility of transformation—how else could France and Germany today be such close allies?

Greater Europe

Greater Europe is a riposte to such hard line realist thinking. It is based on repeating on a larger scale the success of what became the EU in making war almost inconceivable between its member states. It also has a geopolitical dimension, based on a continental vision in which Europe would emerge from the superpower overlay of the Cold War to become an independent pole in world politics (Gromyko & Fëdorova, 2014). Not surprisingly, such a view is anathema to those who believe in the enduring hegemony of the Atlantic power system.

With its roots in various interwar plans for “pan-Europa,” and then in Gaullist aspirations for a more autonomous voice for Europe in the post-war Atlantic system, the idea was reinvigorated by Gorbachev’s plans for a common European home. In the 1990s, the idea was eclipsed by more immediate concerns, but even convinced Atlanticists such as the Russian foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev (2019, pp. 217–222), argued that Russia would become part not only of the Atlantic security system but also that its great power ambitions would be fulfilled in the larger European context. The president at the time, Boris Yeltsin, never failed to argue that “Europe without Russia is not Europe at all. Only with Russia can it be a Greater Europe, with no possible equal anywhere on the globe” (Bershidsky, 2014). The two complemented each other: Russia was a vast and relatively under-developed country rich in natural endowments, while Western Europe had advanced technologies but needed energy and other resources.

Continentalist ideas were in abeyance in the 1990s as Russia signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU and focused on its domestic transformation, but with President Vladimir Putin’s consolidation of power after 2000, the Greater Europe idea was revived. The Russian foreign minister since 2004, Sergei Lavrov (2016), argued that the end of the Cold War

offered a unique opportunity to change the European architecture on the principles of indivisible and equal security and broad co-operation without dividing lines. We had a practical chance to mend Europe’s divide and implement the dream of a common European home, which many European thinkers and politicians, including President Charles de Gaulle of France, wholeheartedly embraced. Russia was fully open to

this option and advanced many proposals and initiatives in this connection.

In the event, the end of the Cold War was marked by a remarkable dearth of new ideas or institutional innovation. Russia favored strengthening the military and political components of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), but instead NATO became the pre-eminent security organization. No political form could be found to encompass the two halves of the continent.

The Russian leadership expended considerable effort to devise a new “architecture” for a united Europe to give organizational form to Russia’s continental aspirations. A major initiative in this respect was President Dmitry Medvedev’s call, in a speech in Berlin on 5 June 2008, for a new European Security Treaty (EST; “Draft,” 2009). Medvedev argued for the creation of a genuinely inclusive security system to avoid new dividing lines. The initiative reflected the long-standing tension between two models of European security. The strictly Atlanticist view focused on U.S. security guarantees for its NATO allies, a view staunchly supported by the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway. The Euro-Atlantic approach recognized U.S. leadership but sought to complement it with continental security initiatives, a view traditionally supported by France and Germany (Fenenko, 2015). Medvedev’s initiative was not intended to drive a wedge between the United States and its European NATO allies, but to strengthen the Euro-Atlanticist perspective, primarily through the OSCE. Medvedev argued for “the necessity of ensuring the unity of the entire Euro-Atlantic space.” It reiterated Moscow’s long-standing concern about “NATO-centrism” in Europe and sought to “transform the OSCE into a fully-fledged regional organisation.”

However, even Medvedev’s mild Euro-Atlanticism was too much for Atlanticists (Diesen & Wood, 2012). They feared that it represented the potential for a shift to full-bodied Europeanism, with a greater security role for the EU and perhaps even a deeper security relationship with Russia. By November 2009, a draft EST was published, calling on signatories to

cooperate with each other on the basis of the principles of indivisible, equal and undiminished security. Any security measures taken by a Party to the Treaty individually or together with other Parties, including in the framework of any international organization military alliance [read NATO] or coalition, shall be implemented with due regard to security interests of all other Parties.

Apart from this fundamental assertion, allowing Russia to block further NATO enlargement, the draft was rather thin. The OSCE launched the “Corfu process” in June 2009 “to restore confidence and take forward dialogue on wider European security,” but in the end nothing was achieved

(OSCE, 2010). The Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative (2011), a commission seeking to lay the “intellectual foundations for an inclusive Euro-Atlantic security system for the twenty-first century,” was yet another attempt to reform the system of European security, but it too ultimately was unable to prevail against hermetic Atlanticism.

Lavrov (2010) reflected on the dilemmas of building Greater Europe in an important speech at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). He stressed the importance of the CoE as a soft security structure and the OSCE as the framework for legally binding agreements, but insisted that the EST was essential to compensate for the failure to create a “European architecture that would unite each and every state without exception in the Euro-Atlantic region into a single organization based on clear and legally binding principles and providing equal security for all.” The main problem for him was that “the principle of indivisible security proclaimed in the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative at the highest level in the 1990s was not embodied in international law.” In keeping with his original strong European leanings, in a speech in Berlin Putin (2010) called for the geopolitical unification of “Greater Europe” from Lisbon to Vladivostok to create a genuine “strategic partnership.” Europe and Russia were to be united into a common strategic and economic area in which resources were pooled. A shared developmental strategy would allow the industrial and military-strategic potential of the region from the Atlantic to the Pacific to be exploited to the maximum. This continental project would lay the foundations for Europe to emerge as a distinctive pole, comparable to China and the United States.

Medvedev (2010) reprised some of these themes at NATO’s summit in Lisbon in November 2010. It was in this spirit that Sergei Karaganov (2009, p. 13), the head of the influential Council for Foreign and Security Policy (SVOP), argued that the EU and Russia should establish not only a partnership but also a strategic union or alliance, which would counteract the relative decline of Europe’s global status and economic weight. He acknowledged that this would be hard to achieve because of the “unfinished character of the ‘Cold War’ in both institutional and intellectual terms.” In his view, the roots of the Cold War were not removed; hence, “some re-growth appeared, because no Europe-wide peace agreement was made to end the Cold War.” This “unfinished character” in the end allowed Cold War-style politics to return.

Russia’s Greater European initiatives were typically seen in the West as being little more than a cover for the establishment of a “greater Russia” by stealth. These concerns were exacerbated by Western perceptions of Russian “democratic backsliding” and the rise of “kleptocratic authoritarianism” (Dawisha, 2011, 2014), as well as the view that Russia was sowing divisions in Europe (Leonard & Popescu, 2007). Russia’s more assertive energy policies, such as the gas supply disruptions with Ukraine in early

2006 and again in early 2009, reinforced these fears. In the end, relations between Russia and the EU deteriorated to the point that Lavrov (2021) even talked about the possibility of a total rupture.

Western Europe itself is torn between continental and Atlanticist impulses. The two are not necessarily opposed, but a formula for their combination has not yet been found. Gaullism is one of the most coherent expressions of continental sovereign internationalism. During his presidency between 1958 and 1969, Charles de Gaulle sought to restore French sovereignty in international affairs. Even though France was a founder member of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, de Gaulle resisted moves toward supranationalism and insisted that what would one day become the EU should remain a “union of nations” based on respect for national traditions. He was particularly critical of Anglo-Saxon claims to hegemony, and in March 1966 expelled NATO headquarters from France, withdrew from its integrated military command, and closed all NATO bases in the country and removed all U.S. forces (Howard, 2016). De Gaulle espoused a vision of pan-European continentalism, and in his famous speech of November 1959 in Strasbourg he spoke of a Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals,” arguing that “it is the whole of Europe, that would decide the destiny of the world.” He considered Atlanticism a project for the subjugation of Europe, and argued that the continent should act as the third pole between the United States and the Soviet Union (although he insisted on calling the country “Russia” rather than the USSR). He believed that Russia’s place was in Europe. He refused to accept the Cold War definition of the political West, which in his view subordinated Europe to American interests (Anceau, 2020). Thirty years later, Gorbachev also delivered his common European home speech in Strasbourg, and this Gaullist conception of a larger pan-Europea, comprising a variety of states and social orders, became “greater Europe,” the idea that Europe should manage its own affairs while acting autonomously in global matters.

Germany is the best exemplar of contemporary Western Europe’s Atlantic orientation. The crisis in Russia’s relations with the Atlantic community coincided with the emergence of Germany as the pre-eminent power in the EU, becoming in effect a “reluctant hegemon” (as much scholarly and journalistic commentary put it). Germany began to eclipse the EU institutions in managing various crises besetting the community, from the fate of the eurozone, the Cyprus financial crisis, Greek debt, and refugees. Moscow misunderstood the nature of its ties with Berlin. Although trade and economic relations were important for both partners, ultimately modern Germany is a child of the Atlantic system, and relations with Atlantic institutions would take precedence over those with Moscow as long as those institutions remained the core of the liberal international order. Since the time of Konrad Adenauer, the country’s first post-war chancellor, *Westbindung* (“binding to the West”) has

been the heart of West German politics, focused on keeping America in Europe. There has been a persistent strain of anti-Americanism, from both left and right, but this has not been enough to re-orient German politics toward a fully fledged independent Europeanism. Not surprisingly, Moscow's espousal of a greater Europe was viewed as not only dividing Germany from America, but as an attack on Germany's democratic identity (Hawes, 2017). Nevertheless, Moscow never quite gave up its hope that Germany would return "to the role of *Mitteleuropäische* balancer of East and West," the tradition dating back to Germany's unification in 1870 and associated in particular with Otto von Bismarck (Rynning, 2015, p. 545).

The Atlantic community's intense vigilance against attempts to drive a wedge between its two wings has been mentioned, and it has been so since various Soviet plans for European security were advanced by Nikita Khrushchev in the 1950s. This Cold War hermetic view prevails to this day, accompanied by the enduring fear that any idea emanating outside of the NATO system is potentially divisive and dangerous. Russia's proposals to resolve the numerous conflicts in Europe were treated with skepticism when not dismissed as self-serving and partisan. This was case throughout the various Balkan crises in the 1990s, and with Russian proposals to resolve the frozen conflict in Transnistria, notably with the Kozak Memorandum in 2003. William Hill (2012), who served two spells as head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova in 1999–2006, reveals how Russia was systemically shut out from the resolution of the Transnistria issue. Russia's effective exclusion from such processes generated the neo-revisionism that has predominated in Russian foreign policy since Putin's return to the presidency in 2012. From Moscow's perspective, it was the Atlantic alliance that was driving a wedge between Russia and Europe, isolating it from the larger process of continental unification.

By denying the logic of transcendence, the Atlanticists precipitated the result that they sought to avert. Europe could not be "whole and free" if Russia was effectively excluded. It was offered associate membership of an existing enterprise (the Historical West), but Russia's enduring aspiration was to become a founder member of a transformed Greater West. An analogous process was at work in Europe, where Russia was offered a "strategic partnership" with the smaller or core Europe, as institutionalized in the EU, but it always favored the transformative and pluralistic creation of a Greater Europe, in which it would be at its origins a founder and core member. The idea of Greater Europe displaces the monist idea of the EU as the sole representative of Europe in favor of a more plural model, in which the EU would be part of a broader pan-European community. Both the Greater West and Greater Europe ideas are based on a dialogical approach to politics—the view that engagement transforms both subjects. Instead, the West tried to stay the same and enlarge, while Russia was to

change to reflect the assumed new power and normative realities (Sakwa, 2017a). For a genuine dialogical process to take place, both sides would have to be prepared to change, but this would be a process in which small first steps could establish a platform for a broader agenda. Neither side would be expected to trade away normative standards or principles as they see them. The gulf in approaches to world order means that there is no "grand bargain" in prospect, hence the only way out of the impasse are modest and pragmatic trust-building small steps. In the context of the Second Cold War, these will be even more difficult than in the original conflict.

From Greater Europe to Greater Eurasia

In recent years, flux has returned to international politics, replacing the relative stasis of the "cold peace" years between 1989 and 2014. The expansion of the Atlantic power system accompanied by the universalizing practices of the liberal international order provoked a confrontation over Ukraine in 2014 and the onset of the Second Cold War (Mastanduno, 2019). The Ukraine conflict signaled the onset of a new era, intensified by the Brexit vote and Trump's election in 2016. Two powerful competing trends are at work. The first is the intensification of Cold War practices, accompanied by reinforced solidarity of the Atlantic powers and a solid front against Russia. One manifestation of this is the maintenance of the sanctions regime imposed in 2014, and sporadically reinforced since then. Every 6 months, the EU renews its sanctions regime, and even though renewal requires unanimity, all members maintained bloc discipline into the new decade, a remarkable (if possibly self-defeating) feat by any standard. Another indicator is the gradual remilitarization of European politics, with rising defense expenditures up to the 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) level mandated by the Wales NATO summit in September 2014, as well as the stationing of NATO forces in the Baltic republics and Poland.

The second recognizes the changing dynamics in international politics, and interprets Russian actions in Ukraine through more of a realist than a normative lens. From this perspective, Russian intervention was a consequence rather than the cause of the breakdown in the European security order. While this second perspective is still a minority view, it was incorporated into President Trump's thinking, albeit in an inconsistent and contradictory way. The Russiagate scandal and the consolidation of the power of the military traditionalists in his administration following the ouster of the first insurgent generation (notably Stephen Bannon and Michael Flynn) stymied the development of this trend, and instead the "bipartisan" foreign policy of American primacy was maintained, although not quite in its traditional forms. Nevertheless, the perceived more benign Trumpian

line in U.S. foreign policy encouraged some in Russia to believe that the internal division, as well as the growing differences with the EU, could be exploited for new diplomatic initiatives, focused on Trump personally, American civil society, and European leaders (Kortunov, 2018).

This second line fanned the embers of the “sad delusion” that positive relations could be reformed with Europe in particular and the West in general. It is in this context that Putin pursued what can be called his “heartland” strategy, the attempt to ensure that Eurasia did not become an arena for an extended “great game” of contestation between the two superpowers of the 21st century, the United States and China. The heartland strategy challenges the peripherality implicit in the EU’s wider Europe approach. To this end, Putin pursued three interlocking policies.

Eurasian integration

The first was Eurasian integration. In his landmark article on the subject in October 2011, Putin emphasized the success of the Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, which was completed on 1 July 2011, and the imminent creation on 1 January 2012 of the Common Economic Space (CES) with the three countries. Already in 2001 the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Customs Union was transformed into the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). He now talked of a future Eurasian Union that would be comparable and compatible with the EU and based on similar principles of trade liberalization and regulatory convergence. After a period of intense bargaining against the background of the Ukraine crisis, the Astana Treaty signed on 29 May 2014 created the EEU. The agreement systematized the provisions already contained in the Customs Union and the CES, including free movement of goods, capital, and labor and harmonization of regulation in 19 areas. The main innovation was the establishment of a common market for services, starting with less important sectors and gradually expanding to cover areas like telecommunications, transportation and financial services. By the mid-2020s, the EEU planned to establish a common financial and banking regulatory and monitoring authority. The most ambitious proposals were postponed, including provision for a common currency, common social policy, and pension system. Plans for the liberalization of markets in a number of sensitive goods, including pharmaceuticals, and the creation of a common oil, gas, and electricity market were dropped (Furman & Libman, 2015), as well as ideas for political cooperation, common citizenship, foreign policy, inter-parliamentary cooperation, passports and visas, and common border protection, as well as the idea of creating a common customs authority.

Despite these caveats, the establishment of the EEU represents the most ambitious attempt since the collapse of the Soviet Union for regional integration in PSE and signaled

that Russia was no longer afraid to challenge the EU’s implicit monopoly on integration efforts in the Greater European space. It signaled the definitive end of the logic of “Wider Europe,” announced in 2002 by Romani Prodi and later institutionalized in the form of the European Neighborhood Project (ENP). Wider Europe was premised on the formation of Brussels-centered concentric circles, in which Russia, by definition, would be a periphery. This ran counter to everything Russia had hoped to achieve since Gorbachev formulated the idea of a pluralistic Common European Home. The concentric model was reinforced with an overtly geopolitical tone in the creation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in May 2009. This was intended to forge Association Agreements with six partner countries: Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, and the South Caucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. A battle of integrations was in the making, reflecting the broader failure to devise and sustain creative pan-European strategies at the end of the Cold War.

This is why the EEU became important for Russia, even though many are skeptical about the need for such an organization. The EEU formally came into existence on 1 January 2015, and the three core members of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia were joined by Armenia on 2 January and Kyrgyzstan in August of that year. The EEU is a far more serious attempt at integration than its predecessors, with its norms and rules embedded in a relatively thick institutional framework. It has a much stronger supranational component than earlier bodies, although not as deep as those of the EU. The EEU is based on liberal economic principles and conforms to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, thus rendering it compatible with comparable regional economic organizations. The EEU covers three-quarters of the post-Soviet region and has a single market of 180 million people and a combined nominal GDP of around US\$5 trillion, compared with the EU’s GDP of US\$18.8 trillion. It was initially anticipated that the two other members of EurAsEC (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) would join, but their membership remains on hold.

The EEU was launched in the least propitious of circumstances, with Russia entering a period of recession as a result of the exhaustion of the old growth model, the drop in oil prices and the imposition of sanctions. None of the other members are willing to come into confrontation with the West in the same manner as Russia, and refuse to follow its lead on Ukraine. Russia’s partners insist that the EEU remain a strictly functional economic integration project, and resist plans for supranational political integration that would infringe their sovereignty. While labor mobility has been greatly facilitated, and trade in goods and services eased, various meat and dairy and other conflicts with Belarus suggest that there is a long way to go before a fully functioning single market is established. Russia’s partners resent having to buy Russian goods rather than more competitive international items, such as automobiles. In fact,

intra-EEU trade fell as a proportion of the total, and in 2018 represented only 13.5% of turnover. Members inherited a visa-free regime (with some restrictions) from EurAsEC, and this remains in place.

Eurasian integration is posed as a mode of reconciliation, not just for its member states but also to give greater gravity and weight to the “missing middle” between the Atlantic community and greater Asia. Rather than the core Eurasian states joining the EU-centered Wider Europe and the Atlantic community individually, Eurasian integration allows its member states to bargain as a bloc (Krickovic, 2014). Of course, far from all the core former Soviet states see this as a necessity, and some, particularly Ukraine, have been notably allergic to the very idea. At the time of joining, the EEU in May 2015, Kyrgyzstan was worried about losing its unique *entrepôt* status between China and Central Asia. Uzbekistan has traditionally been the Ukraine of the East, only reluctantly participating in Russian-driven integration projects, although under the new president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, from 2016 this began to change. There are some similar challenges at both ends of core Eurasia, but they are far from symmetrical. Above all, while the EU and the EEU are effectively competing in the same market, China offers a rather different package of goods. The focus is on bilateral trade and investment, and eschews institution building or regulatory and normative transformation and instead focuses on connectivity, trade and infrastructure development. Russia tried to get the EEU states to negotiate economic agreements as a bloc, whereas the smaller states sought to do so bilaterally, hoping to play China off against Russia to get a better deal.

Eurasian integration and the greater Eurasia idea in general owe less to the ideologist of geopolitical Eurasianism, Alexander Dugin, than to Russia’s foreign and then prime minister in the late 1990s, Evgeny Primakov, the exponent of the eponymous Primakov Doctrine of a Sino-Russian alliance “against Western unilateralism” (Levin, 2008, p. 130). Lavrov (2014) stressed that in conditions of Western sanctions the importance of Euro-Asian and EEU integration increased. He argued that the EEU

is based on equality, economic interest and mutual respect. The Union maintains each members’ sovereignty and identity, taking integration and cooperation to a new level. It is destined to play a significant role in improving the competitiveness of the national economies of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, as well as stabilizing the whole region.

Nevertheless, Eurasian integration came in for considerable criticism. The perception that Eurasian integration is little more than a fallback option, a second-best plan given Russia’s failure to integrate effectively with wider Europe, shadows the whole endeavor. While Putin and his colleagues stress that Eurasian integration is a positive and progressive manifestation of regional cooperation, emulating the Monnet moment of shared sovereignty, the smaller

states fear that pooled sovereignty means the loss of independence. Euro-skepticism has its counterpart in Eurasia-skepticism. The problem is made all the worse by the gross internal asymmetries. Russia’s dominance permeates the fabric of the EEU (Krickovic & Bratersky, 2016).

The EEU’s place in the broader context of European politics remains fundamentally contested, and its internal development is also disputed. Member states seek to retain maximum room for maneuver while gaining maximum benefit. As in the EU, there will always be tension between the powers of the member states and supranational bodies, but in this case the balance between the perceived benefits participants receive in exchange for the loss of sovereignty is far from clear. Britain’s withdrawal from the EU in 2020 sharpened the fundamental question about the necessity of Eurasian integration. It raises the question of “Ruxit” from the integration institutions that it had earlier sponsored. If the circumstances become propitious, some of the smaller states may also be tempted to cut and run. This would cause far less upheaval than exit from the EU, since so far there has not been the degree of state transformation that in the EU turned countries into member states (Bickerton, 2012).

The global trend toward integration appears to have stalled, but the circumstances of PSE are unique. In his programmatic article “Russia, Forward!,” Medvedev (2009) argued that Russia was economically backward and distorted by dependence on extractive industries: “Should a primitive economy based on raw materials and endemic corruption accompany us into the future?” This relates to the broader question of whether Eurasian integration can be seen as a progressive project. There remains the fundamentally normative question of the values on which Eurasian integration takes place. At present, a negative norm is advanced based on non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. Russia’s definition of a great power entails a negative dimension based on a type of order enshrining sovereignty, non-interventionism and a pluralism of regime types (Kokoshin, 2006). Integration restrains Russia’s sovereignty and freedom of action as a great power, and contradicts the commonly held perception of Eurasian integration as a Russian imperial or hegemonic project. From a free market perspective, liberals also question the need for integration, further fostering the idea of Ruxit. Eurasian integration is based on normative criteria that undermine integration, a contradiction that will sooner or later have to be resolved.

The classic Western view that Eurasian integration is little more than a project for the imperial restoration of a “greater Russia” in the guise of a multilateral regional organization is now giving way to a more sober appreciation of its value as a forum for regional engagement. Russian aspirations for a broader revival of Soviet-era relationships have encountered firm resistance from national states, while the elites themselves have to come to terms with the realities of multi-level governance in which sovereignty is both shared and enhanced by membership in a

putative supranational association. The reality of the EEU is that of a complex set of relationships in a rapidly evolving global environment permeated by threats and also by opportunities.

The Russian Far East

The second leg of Putin's heartland strategy is greater emphasis on the development of Siberia and above all the Russian Far East (RFE). To this end, Russia hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Vladivostok in 2012, and in preparation developed significant infrastructure including the construction of two major bridges. A modern new campus was built for the newly established Far Eastern Federal University, which since 2015 serves as the venue for the annual Eastern Economic Forum. Special economic zones have also been created, as well as creating a free port with special customs and taxation regulations in Vladivostok. In a move reminiscent of Pyotr Stolypin's measures a century earlier to encourage settlement in Russia's east, land is granted to people ready to put it to productive use. However, the development of the region is not always helped by Moscow's centralized approach to the region's development. Changes to the 1994 production sharing agreement saw 75% of oil and gas revenues from the lucrative Sakhalin-2 project go to Moscow, whereas hitherto only 25% went to the center. In January 2020, cabinet reshuffle Yury Trutnev remained the minister responsible for the RFE and presidential envoy to the region. He was also promoted to become a deputy prime minister, indicating the importance Mikhail Mishustin's administration gave to the region. At the same time, instead of focusing on social needs and the modernization of the health, education, and urban services, grand infrastructure projects are envisaged such as the construction of an "energy bridge" from Sakhalin to Japan's northern-most region of Hokkaido. There is even talk of building a combined road and rail route from Hokkaido to Sakhalin, and another bridge from Sakhalin to the Russian mainland, thus linking Japan physically for the first time with the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Eurasian mainland as a whole (Brown & Kozinets, 2017). The Putin system is better geared to invest in mega-projects than patiently developing the municipal services, sports facilities, and health systems required by citizens in their daily lives.

China and the GEP

Third, Russia forged stronger links with China and a range of Asian multilateral bodies, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The launch in 2013 of what was to become China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has the potential to transform Eurasia's geopolitics and economics. The plan to invest tens of billions of dollars in the vast Eurasian region and Africa on infrastructure and other

forms of connectivity marks China's coming of age as a global power. The GEP is one of Russia's responses. Although vague on detail and institutionally confusing, the basic idea of GEP is for Russia and its allies to retain autonomy in the new construct and not be swallowed up by the Chinese giant on the one side or the Historical West on the other. This could only be achieved by enhancing the collective weight of PSE, Putin's heartland strategy. Russia was marginalized in the Atlantic system, but by repositioning itself as a Eurasian power it sought to regain centrality. It rejects the idea of Russia as a periphery of Europe or Asia. The GEP is more than a way of compensating for failures in the West but represents what many in Moscow consider is a long-delayed rebalancing of policy. Russia emerged as the main proponent of the creation of a parallel set of global institutions to those dominated by the Historical West and potentially by the reborn East. The plan is to work with the new East while not closing the door to good relations with the Historical West.

Russia became a key partner for China's BRI. In May 2015, Russia and China agreed to "conjugate" (*sopryazhenie*) their various initiatives as part of a single strategy. Putin first publicly talked of a "Greater Eurasia Partnership" in his annual address to parliament on 3 December 2015. He called for discussions to establish an economic partnership between the EEU, ASEAN, and the SCO. His speech drew on the ideas outlined in a Valdai Club report (Valdai Discussion Club, 2015) on how to link the EEU and Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) within a larger Eurasian framework. The aim was to maintain stability in Central Asia and to avoid Russo-Chinese rivalry. The project was then mentioned on several occasions in 2016. At the St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) on 17 June 2016, Putin outlined grandiose plans for "greater Eurasia." The details were vague, but the basic thrust was clear: Russia would encourage the "integration of integrations" across a range of institutions encompassing all of Eurasia. Russia seeks to take advantage of the billions that China plans to invest in Eurasia to its benefit by tying Russia's economic development more closely to China's rapidly growing economy. Moscow wants to be more than a source of natural resource but seeks to become part of cross-national production and value chains that are centered in China (Diesen, 2019). It also represents recognition that Russia on its own cannot develop Eurasia, but needs China and other emerging powers' economic clout to do so. Formalizing relations between EEU and BRI (the conjugation) also helps Russia preserve its importance as an economic stakeholder even as its economic dominance in the region is diminished. This is far more than "Russia's Asian fantasy" (Starr, 2020).

The geographical limits of Greater Eurasia are unclear, and in some versions, it includes just PSE and China, whereas in others it encompasses all of Western Europe and the whole ASEAN region. Nevertheless, instead of the

much-vaunted but still-born Greater Europe, Putin (2016) announced,

As early as June we, along with our Chinese colleagues, are planning to start official talks on the formation of comprehensive trade and economic partnership in Eurasia with the participation of the European Union states and China. I expect that this will be one of the first steps towards the formation of a major Eurasian partnership.

He was at pains to stress that this did not mean rejecting Europe: “Despite all the well-known problems in our relations,” the EU remained Russia’s “key trade and economic partner.” He thus invited Europeans to join the project for the Eurasian partnership and welcomed the initiative by Nazarbayev to hold consultations between the EEU and the EU. Contrary to those who argue that Putin sought to weaken the EU and to exacerbate its internal divisions, the ambitious plan for a trading bloc from the Atlantic to the Pacific sought to make the EU a full partner, with the support of the Chinese leadership. Russia refused to choose between Europe and Asia, and instead the greater Eurasia idea seeks to unite the two as well as filling in the middle with the EEU.

The GEP and allied projects is part of the more profound strategy of developing a model of world order based on sovereign internationalism. Russia’s long-term rebalancing to the East focused on the “strategic partnership” with China, but this was accompanied by improved trading and political engagement with India, Japan, and the ASEAN bloc as a whole. Russia and China encouraged the development of post-western associations, ranging from the SCO, BRICS, and a whole set of anti-hegemonic actors as well as the G20. These were not anti-western, but represented a framework for an anti-hegemonic alignment to structure what the Russia’s call a polycentric (multipolar) world. All of this represents a long-term shift in global politics. The scholar and commentator Sergei Karaganov (2018, p. 8) calls this an “end to the Petrine period in Russian history,” in which Russia for 500 years looked to Europe for innovation and development. Russia would maintain good-neighborly relations with Europe, but its horizons and model of the future would no longer be located there. In other words, the West’s sanctions regime, and the abuse of the open trading regime and the rules-based order that it claimed to represent, was perceived in Moscow as only accelerating its own marginalization. The rest of the world had more positive agendas to pursue.

The Astana SCO meeting in June 2017 was attended by the new UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and the final communiqué reaffirmed the fundamental normative principles of sovereign internationalism:

The heads of state called for strict adherence to the goals and principles of the UN Charter, above all the equality and sovereignty of states, non-interference in internal affairs,

mutual respect of territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, non-aggression, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-use of force or threat of force as well as other generally recognised norms of international law aimed at maintaining peace and security, developing cooperation between states, strengthening independence, ensuring the right of countries to determine their own future and their own path of political, socioeconomic and cultural development. (“Press Release,” 2017)

There was no need here for the “liberal international order” to teach these states how to manage their domestic affairs or international relations. However, while Russia dominates the EEU, in greater Eurasia it is in danger of being eclipsed by China. Predictions of the decline of the West may be exaggerated, and some sort of path toward rapprochement between Russia and the West would make sense (Ferrari, 2020, p. 47).

Return to Greater Europe

Given the crisis in Ukraine and the souring of relations, Putin (2014) rather surprisingly returned to the idea of creating a free-trade zone from the Atlantic to the Pacific at the Russo-EU summit in Brussels on 28 January 2014 (the last to be held in that format). Despite the breakdown in relations, Russia refused to relinquish the Greater European cooperative path of development (Gromyko, 2015). At various points, the Russian leadership signaled that the door to Russo-EU rapprochement remained open.

The reason for this is clear. Despite the breakdown in relations with the Historical West, Russia under Putin retains elements of its earlier commitment to pan-continental unity. Russia is not a full-scale revisionist power but pursues a neo-revisionist strategy (Sakwa, 2019). Its neo-revisionism is tempered by a continued commitment to the institutions of the international system established in the wake of the Second World War. This is complemented by an enduring idealism founded on the belief that ultimately the Historical West could still become a Greater West with Russian participation, and pan-continental initiatives would make Russia a comfortable member of Greater Europe. In other words, despite the withering criticism to which the NPT has been subjected by domestic critics, elements of Gorbachev’s idealism endure. The argument is not accepted by mainstream Atlanticists in the West, who dismiss the normative basis of Moscow’s politics of resistance and instead argue that it is based on no more than the traditional Soviet attempt to sow confusion and discord in the Atlantic community, and to drive a wedge between the two wings of the alliance. Russia of course uses all the means at its disposal to break out of the various neo-containment strategies deployed against it, but one of them is the idealist vision of a transformed Greater Europe.

If the viability of a pluralist Greater Europe project is questioned, let alone its potential evolution into a more solidaristic community, then the continent faces three

alternatives. First, there is the continued consolidation and enlargement of the Atlantic community, accompanied by increased militarization and conditionality toward its neighbors, and a tutelary relationship with Russia. This is the model from which Moscow, for reasons discussed above, felt excluded and provoked the breakdown epitomized by the conflict in and over Ukraine. The second is the “promise of a continental concert,” reprising the Concert of Europe. Many in Russia are attracted to this option, especially since it echoes the Yalta-Potsdam settlement at the end of the Second World War, which legitimated the USSR’s status as one of the arbiters of the fate of Europe. This includes the “balance of power,” which can entail restraint (when practiced by a Metternich or a Bismarck), as well as unbridled power maximization. The third option is unrestrained great power rivalry accompanied by extreme geopolitical rivalry, the path that NATO’s continued existence was designed to foreclose. This was the system that collapsed with devastating effect in 1914 and which was revived in 2014.

This raises the fundamental and still unresolved question: is Russia still interested in joining a transformed West today? Or has it realized that the only way to retain great power status and sovereign decision-making is to remain outside the West? Joining the transformed West meant the attempt to create Greater Europe, Gorbachev’s Common European Home in an updated guise. For defenders of the existing West, this is perceived as threatening its existing values, norms and freedoms, and perhaps more importantly, the existing hierarchy of international power. But for Russia, it is a way out of the perceived geopolitical impasse and offers a common developmental strategy. This is why Putin at SPIEF in June 2019 talked about the failure of the “Euro-Atlantic” economic system. He argued that

the existing model of economic relations is still in crisis and this crisis is of a comprehensive nature. Problems in this respect have been piling up throughout the past few decades. They are more serious and larger than it seemed before. (Putin, 2019)

Here and on other occasions, he condemned the Atlantic powers’ use of sanctions as a form of economic warfare. On the eve of SPIEF on 5 June, Putin and Chinese president Xi Jinping announced the upgrade of their relationship to a “Comprehensive Partnership of Coordination for a New Era,” accompanied by a Joint Statement on strategic cooperation and global strategic stability (Xinhua, 2019). By then China had been Russia’s largest trading partner for nine consecutive years, and in 2018 surpassed the US\$100 billion mark for the first time. The agreement on trade and economic cooperation signed between the EEU and China on 17 May 2018, and which came into effect on 25 October 2019, remains the cornerstone for coordination between the EEU and BRI. The goal was the “comprehensive coordination of integration initiatives,” the “integration of integrations,” as

Lavrov (2020) put it. He argued that “The Greater Eurasian Partnership is being established objectively on the continent in the form of a wide network of free-trade zones,” and he mentioned those agreed with Singapore, Serbia, and Iran.

Russia has returned as an international conservative power, but it is not a revisionist one, and even less is it out to subvert the West (Sakwa, 2020). Russia certainly looks for allies where it can find them, especially if they advocate the lifting of sanctions. When President Emmanuel Macron (2019) argued that it was time to bring Russia out of the cold, arguing that “We cannot rebuild Europe without rebuilding a connection with Russia,” his comments were welcomed in Moscow, although tempered by justifiable skepticism. The Putin elite had earlier welcomed Trump’s election, but in practice relations deteriorated further. The foreign policy establishment is deeply skeptical that the EU will be able to act with “strategic autonomy.” Above all, Russo-Western relations have entered into a dangerous version of the security dilemma in which each side has lost confidence in their statecraft, what Troitskiy (2019) calls a statecraft “security dilemma”:

Currently, we are again faced with a situation in which mutual intentions are assessed by Washington and Moscow as subversive, while each side considers the statecraft employed by the other side as effective enough to achieve its malign goals. At the same time, each side is more sceptical about its own statecraft and appears (or pretends) to be scrambling to catch up.

In the 19th century, Russia became the “gendarme” of Europe, and while Putin explicitly repudiates Russia assuming such a role again, it is undoubtedly a status quo conservative power. This is the essence of its neo-revisionism: a defense of traditional ideas of state sovereignty and of an internationalism structured by commitment to the structures of the international system as it took shape after 1945. Russia resents its perceived exclusion from the institutions of Atlantic hegemony (NATO and the EU), but is not out to subvert the larger society in which this competition is waged. In other words, Atlanticism is challenged to the degree that it is perceived to violate the norms of the larger international system and the primary and secondary institutions of international society, but this does not entail subverting, let alone destroying, the Atlantic institutions as a whole. Thus, Anton Shekhovtsov (2017) is mistaken to argue that Russia’s links to right-wing national populist movements is rooted in philosophical anti-Westernism and an instinct to subvert the liberal democratic consensus in the West. In fact, the alignment is situational and contingent on the impasse in Russo-Western relations, and thus is susceptible to modification if the situation changes.

Moscow’s readiness to embrace Trump in 2016 when he repeatedly argued that it made sense to “get on” with Russia indicates that Western overtures for improved relations would find the Kremlin ready to reciprocate. In 2017, the

Kremlin sent Washington various ideas on how to move out of the impasse in U.S.–Russian relations, but given the “Russiagate” allegations, the White House was in no position to respond. The same applies when in 2019 Russia was invited to resume full voting rights in the PACE, which the Kremlin embraced even though powerful domestic neo-traditionalist and Eurasianist voices counseled against. In short, the Greater European project remains one of Russia’s options, but its fulfillment would take the concerted actions of all the European great and middling powers. The present impasse is relatively stable, and given all the impediments (structural, ideational, institutional, and coordinative) of transcending the Atlantic power system, it may be considered the only realistic option. However, this is a far from optimal outcome, and it threatens to condemn both Russia and Europe to marginalization and peripherality. This is why Greater Europe remains a perennial aspiration. What for one generation is a sad delusion, for another becomes a realistic and necessary project.

Conclusion

For Russian critics, joining the Historical West (the existing liberal order) would deprive Russia of its great power status, hence the attempts to create a transformed greater West in which Russia would be a founding member and a great power in a more endogenously pluralist order. In the end, even the exogenous pluralism represented by association in the Wider West was foreclosed, and the hermetic and closed character of the Historic West prevailed. In response, Russia developed its heartland strategy, which included a deep partnership with China as part of an anti-hegemonic alignment and Greater Eurasian aspirations. At the same time, the heartland is intended to provide Russia and its allies with greater room for maneuver in the emerging bipolar structure in international politics. This also means not closing the door to the revival of Greater European ideas. France under Macron took the lead in recognizing that European international politics needs to resist what he termed the “deep state” (by which he meant the defenders of traditional Atlanticism) and shift from the ideological framework of values and identity in relations with Russia toward policy-focused engagement with real issues of importance to all sides. This would allow a move away from confrontation to diplomacy. As flux replaces stasis in global affairs, the past becomes less of an effective guide to the future. Some ideas endure, and one of these is pan-continental European unity.

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