

# NATO/EU-RUSSIA-UKRAINE “TRIANGLE” RELATIONS: VIEW FROM SPAIN



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The study of the NATO/EU-Russia-Ukraine security triangle will be tackled in three steps: first, the internal relations of the “West” side, as NATO and EU are very different organisations, and actually their strategic relations are very complicated; second, the relations between the West and the Russian Federation; third, how to integrate Ukraine in the triangle, taking into account its national interests and the current geopolitical trends.

## The NATO-EU side of the triangle

It is kind of paradoxical to study the difficulties of coordination and even the frictions that have presided during the last decade the relations between two organisations that share twenty-one of their members. In some way, NATO and the EU are like two inconveniently united Siamese twins: they have many common organs, but their separated heads are not coordinated.

NATO, under the leadership of the US, has been the cornerstone of the Euro-Atlantic security for decades. When the Cold War ended and the main enemy didn't exist anymore, the Alliance kept a key role in the crafting of a new strategic environment, mainly due to the lack of any functional alternative. As a consequence, the Strategic Concept of 1991 added new responsibilities (cooperation and political dialogue) to its basic mission, the collective defence.

The year 1999 was very relevant for the Euro-Atlantic security architecture: NATO conducted a military campaign against Yugoslavia due to the crisis in Kosovo, which evidenced the capability gap between the US and the European allies, and a new Strategic Concept was approved in Washington, in which NATO manifested its will to cooperate with the almost ineffective Western European Union (WEU).

The year before Europe took a step forward when it assumed the 1998 bilateral agreements between France and the UK in Saint-Malo (*“the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises”*) fostering the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

So it was necessary to figure out how the two organisations could cooperate on an efficient way. Eventually, the so-called “Berlin +” agreements entered into force in 2003, establishing the procedures for granting the EU access to some NATO capabilities, when the Alliance as a whole decided not to intervene on a security crisis.

These formal agreements were also quickly overcome by events, as only in two ESDP operations the EU took advantage of NATO assets for planning and execution (“Concordia” in Macedonia and “Althea” in Bosnia). The main reason is that Cyprus, member of the EU since 2004, doesn't participate in the “Partnership for Peace” program, so it is prevented from participating in any “Berlin +” operation, something unacceptable for the other EU member states.

This year of 2010 two important events will happen: the approval of a new Strategic Concept for the NATO and the entry into force of the new Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) tools included in the Treaty of Lisbon. Under those circumstances, which could be the future for the NATO-EU relation? Considering the current situation, and carrying out an exercise of perspective, there could be basically three possible futures:

- The US wants nothing to do with the European security and the EU fully develops the CSDP, including the common defence considered in the Lisbon Treaty. This future is neither probable (as it implies a maximum agreement among the EU member states) nor desirable, as the maintenance and reinforcement of the transatlantic link is key for the regional security.



- The US encourages the CSDP development, and the EU carries it out, but short of establishing a common defence. That would enable the substitution of NATO by a bilateral agreement US-EU. That future would be not only possible but also desirable, however it is less probable due to the political level ambition that implies.
- The US keeps a limited interest in NATO, as a simple additional tool in its security box, and the new Strategic Concept recognises the importance of the reinforced CSDP post-Lisbon. That seems to be the prevailing trend and can lead to a more balanced and effective cooperation between NATO and the EU, improving the current status-quo.

### The West-Russia relationships

When addressing Russia's complex relationships with the West, some authors point out that Russian leaders today look not for integration with it, but for a return to a special Russian greatness. This analysis is erroneous from the very beginning, as the Federation is too large and complex to be integrated into the European institutions as an ordinary member. This was attempted during the Yeltsin's presidency, but now is a possibility which has been almost completely ruled out by both Russia and the West.

During the Putin's first term as president Russia aspired to cooperate with the West, while laying the foundations for domestic recovery. Subsequent developments in international relations have conducted to a third stage in which Russia defines itself as an independent superpower with global interests, adopting a position of strength in its foreign relations. This new phase has been detrimental to European security as a whole and to Russia's own interests, and hampers its almost symbiotic cooperation with the EU.

### The EU and Russia: “Partnership and Cooperation Agreement” and “Common Spaces”

During the 1990s the EU attempted to apply to Russia the same strategic guidelines as to the Central European countries: to foster a change in its system and conversion into a market economy by means of external economic and political pressure. For this purpose it designed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), entered into force in 1997, which can't be considered a true strategic agreement between the EU and Russia.

At the EU-Russia Summit held in St. Petersburg in May 2003, it was agreed to reinforce bilateral relations by creating four “Common Spaces”, based on common values and shared interests, one of them devoted to External Security. Two years later, at the Moscow Summit of May 2005, it was agreed to develop instruments to put the common spaces into practice, the so-called “roadmaps” establishing concrete goals and specifying the actions required to achieve them.

### EU-Russia convergences and divergences in the post-Soviet area

It is necessary to underline two of the main obstacles to deepening the strategic relationship between Russia and the EU. *First*, the Union's lack of internal cohesion. *Second*, the action of a third party, the US, which incidentally has little concern for the problems it



may cause to the EU by its attempts to secure greater influence in Eurasia.

The Union's major enlargement of 2004 to take in its new Eastern European members also marked the start of problems of all kinds with the Russian Federation, including historical resentment, the perception of Russia as a real threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty and even the substantial Russian minorities who inhabit those countries. The consequences are very serious; for example, Poland's veto at the start of the negotiations for renewing the PCA in 2006 brought the talks to a standstill for two years.

So the Union needs first to apply internal discipline, in order to adopt common positions, and external rigour in order to put them into practice and defend its own interests – which do not always coincide with those of the US. It is very understandable and respectable that the new partners harbour misgivings about Russia, but history is no excuse for using the rights associated with Union membership as a means of exacting revenge, especially considering that the *acquis communautaire* has been based on reconciling old enemies, such as France and Germany.

### NATO and Russia

In the new released document “NATO 2020: assured security; dynamic engagement”, containing the recommendations of a group of experts on a new strategic concept, it is said that: “*NATO should pursue a policy of engagement with Russia while reassuring all Allies that their security and interests will be defended... Russia has sent conflicting signals about its openness to further cooperation with NATO and its proposals for an alternative security order in Europe seem designed in part to constrain NATO's activities*”.

But, what does NATO represent for Russia? On 13 May, 2009, the Kremlin published a new “National Security Strategy of Russia through to 2020”. It thus asserts that NATO is responsible for the current instability of the security architecture in the Eurasian region, and that a further expansion of the Alliance towards Russia's borders (read to take in Ukraine and/or Georgia) is unacceptable.

So bottom-line is that, whatever formal cooperation mechanisms are established, as the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), there is not a solution for improving that relation, as each side sees the other through the old paradigms of the Cold War.



### What a role for Ukraine in the Euro Atlantic security?

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in the context of the EU's major enlargement in 2004, with the goal of preventing the emergence of dividing lines between the Union and its new neighbours and consolidating the stability, security and wellbeing of them all. It thus also addresses the strategic objectives established in the European Security Strategy, but with a bilateral focus that makes it inadequate to face the security challenges in the Euro-Atlantic area.

Therefore in 2009 the EU launched a new initiative, the "Eastern Partnership", to further and complement bilateral relations and to continue building stability and multilateral confidence. In the sphere of the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP), it is stated that existing conflicts hamper cooperation activities, and the need is therefore underlined to settle them as soon as possible on the basis of the principles and rules of international law and the decisions and documents adopted in this new framework.

Cooperation projects are addressed in four thematic platforms of which only one, energy security, is linked to the CSDP. This approach is somewhat limited, as a more general security platform could have been envisaged which, encompassing energy issues, would also deal with CSDP coordination with these nations in areas of common interest and their potential contribution of capabilities.

What is more, it does not seem to make much sense that the "thematic platforms" of the Eastern Partnership do not coincide with the common spaces of EU-Russia cooperation, or indeed that the programmes for cooperation with the "common neighbourhood" are not coordinated in the framework of the strategic partnership between the two entities, which would help allay misgivings and misunderstandings.

Of course, Ukraine is the linchpin state for the whole Eastern Partnership, with 46 million of the region's 76 million inhabitants and over half its GDP. If we consider how Ukraine could be integrated in the regional security architecture, three traditionally discussed basic options could be identified:

- to conserve a non-bloc status, or even to obtain a neutral one;
- to seek the NATO membership;
- to access to the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

The first option can be discarded, as the neutral status hardly could be achieved (for instance, due to the Russian military presence in Sebastopol), and that wouldn't represent a guarantee against the threats to national security, particularly territorial integrity, due to the geopolitical position of Ukraine.

Applying for NATO membership was a political gamble of the Orange Revolution's leaders, but it proved to be not only unviable but also deeply contrary to the Ukraine's interests, due to the consequences for its relations with Russia. After the Bucharest summit in April 2008 that door could be considered definitively closed, so Ukraine should look for a more balanced relation with both the West and Russia.

Access to the CSTO is opened to Ukraine, as the Russian president declared in Kyiv on May 18, 2010: "It is for Ukraine itself to make such decisions: If Ukraine wants to join the CSTO it is welcome. If Ukraine has reservations on this matter this is something we respect". But if Ukraine applied for CSTO membership that would polarise the society, as it happened with the NATO accession intentions, so it also would be harmful for its national interests.

So is there any way ahead? The answer is yes. In the past, in order to be protected from external aggressions a nation should be member of a collective defence alliance, if it had not enough independent military means. But nowadays there is another option for Ukraine: to declare itself a "non-bloc" country (giving up any accession project to NATO or CSTO), and to continue applying for EU membership, which after Lisbon would represent to be under the umbrella of the mutual defence clause.

In that sense, the "Eastern Partnership" should become a real road to membership, and the Ukrainian efforts should be focused on making progresses in the accession criteria; these efforts could include, as first steps, to participate in initiatives as the Battle Groups, even integrating in one of them (as Norway, a non-member state, did in the "Nordic Battle Group"), or to adopt the European Defence Agency (EDA) standards, to assure future interoperability.

### CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, it seems that the most suitable option for Ukraine to be integrated in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture would be through EU membership, without discarding some practical cooperation with NATO and CSTO. Even considering it as political sci-fi, the desired end-state would be:

- a united and capable EU fully developing the CSDP;
- a bilateral comprehensive security agreement between the US and the EU;
- a real strategic partnership between the EU and Russia based on the four "common spaces" and the "roadmaps";
- a "Helsinki II" agreement establishing a single security space, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as a result of the OSCE's "Corfu process".

With the latter, Ukraine and the other European countries not belonging to the current structures would get enough security guarantees, and eventually would be fully integrated in the system as they become EU members. ■