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ABSTRACT: Events in Ukraine have rekindled discussions about NATO’s post Cold War purpose and the way it relates to the EU. Through EU sanctions and a traditional military response from NATO, the West has manoeuvred itself into a paradoxical situation where every step it takes to reassure its Eastern allies increases rather than diffuses tensions with Russia. On the one hand, it seems that decades of carefully crafted strategic narratives of de-escalation are now in limbo. On the other, it might have indeed been the sustained attempt to create a liberal post-Cold War order that produced an “integration dilemma”, and ultimately drove Russia to the defensive realist logic of a Waltzian “security dilemma”. We argue that NATO’s reaction might have been based on a stylised threat and historical resentments rather than on a carefully calculated risk. Looking beyond the EU and NATO’s recent strategic choices, we argue that the situation can only be resolved by re-engaging Russia in a renewed de-escalatory dialogue that involves both the EU and NATO with a greater emphasis on the nuanced, but important, distinctions between the integration and security dilemmas.

Keywords: EU-NATO; Ukraine; Russia; integration dilemma; security dilemma;

## **Introduction**

Russia’s sudden invasion of Georgia in 2008, its annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and subsequent infiltrations in Ukraine including the constant testing of European territorial air and sea defences raised awareness in the West “about the possibility of military attack and occupation” (Blockmans and Faleg 2015, p. 2) and thereby also sparked a new round of debates regarding NATO’s future and how the “the return of war on Europe’s border” would affect the Alliance’s political and institutional relationship with the EU (European Union 2015, p. 11). For some, this is the continuation of a debate that started with the end of the Cold War when, in the face of the demise of the Soviet Union, NATO seemed to have lost its primary purpose.

At the time, structural realists declared NATO a “disappearing thing” (Waltz 1990 cited in Hellmann and Wolf 1993, p. 3) while liberal institutionalists saw a window of opportunity for the Alliance to change and adapt to a changing security environment (see e.g. Haftendorn, Keohane & Wallender 1999), an effort that some portrayed as a “metamorphosis from Cold War nightmare to post-Cold War daydream” (Booth and Wheeler 1992, p. 21). As part of a comprehensive re-make and demonstration of its continued relevance, NATO attempted a transformation from classic military alliance into an organisation with broader political ambitions, adding to its role of security guarantor for Europe the one of “democracy promoter” and “global interventionist” and thereby converging somewhat with EU efforts to develop its own comprehensive security and foreign policy profile (Wolff 2009, p. 476). Meanwhile, the development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) had to be couched as something that was not aimed to openly challenge the role of NATO and would instead focus on complementing it.

The discussion surrounding NATO’s utility was rekindled in the context of the Russia-Georgian war in 2008, peaked again in 2009 on the occasion of the Alliance’s sixtieth anniversary and, more recently, in the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea. The lines of the debate are reasonably well-rehearsed: NATO has outlived its usefulness, especially in a world with many new security threats that often emanate from non-state actors, and it is in strategic limbo following the U.S. pivot towards Asia and the long-standing failure of other Alliance members, including large EU member states, to adequately support NATO (Carpenter 2016). The riposte is just as well-rehearsed: NATO remains relevant because it has proven that it can adapt and operate “out of area” and, with strong American leadership, the Alliance will not only endure, with adaptation, but contribute to a more secure world (Atlantic Council 2016). There are of course more nuanced accounts of why and how NATO needs to adapt and to what (e.g. Hallams, Ratti and Zyla 2014; Webber and Hyde-Price 2016). However, the

salient point here is that the need for NATO to redefine its *raison d'être* has been on the agenda since the end of the Cold War, along with the question of whether the Europeans would build their own, autonomous system of security governance alongside it and how this would affect EU-NATO cooperation.

At the official level there are increasingly long protestations of NATO's continued relevance.<sup>1</sup> The EU, at least in part, acknowledges this by agreeing that NATO has been "the bedrock of Euro-Atlantic security for almost 70 years" and that "it remains the strongest and most effective military alliance in the world" (EUGS 2016, p. 36). However, the EU's Global Strategy also reflects the institutional membership asymmetries, noting that EU-NATO relations shall not prejudice the security and defence policies of the EU's six non-NATO members.<sup>2</sup> This then leads to some careful language on EU-NATO cooperation, whereby cooperation will be deepened "in complementarity, synergy, and full respect for the institutional framework, inclusiveness and decision-making autonomy of the two" (EUGS 2016, p. 20). Away from the niceties of official communications and communiqués, post-Cold War relations between the EU and NATO have been cloaked in ambivalence, and since 2004 in particular they are best described as "formal non-cooperation" at the political level, with various informal forms of *ad hoc* cooperation in the field (see Gebhard, Smith and Tomic in this volume; Græger and Haugevik 2013; Gebhard and Smith 2015; Græger 2016; Himmrich and Raynova 2017).<sup>3</sup>

The difficulties associated with formal cooperation between the EU and NATO are often ascribed to the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the Union in 2004, thus institutionalising differences over the Cyprus issue between the respective organisations (Tzimitras and Hatay 2016, 7-8). This, however, over-simplifies the picture since the two organisations have been tacitly competing for a middle-ground in security, concentrating on crisis management since the end of the Cold War. The lack of an obvious territorial threat undermined the centrality of NATO's Article 5 (mutual self-defence in case of territorial

aggression) and led the Alliance to stress its relevance with regard to a wider set of security challenges. The EU's relatively young security and defence policy (which later became the CSDP) was developing in the same direction with the assumption of a broad set of peacekeeping activities from the Western European Union with the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1999. Hence even prior to 2004 questions of institutional prestige and even survival were tied up with issues of the appropriate levels of cooperation and potential overlap (and, behind closed doors, competition).

Aspects of *de jure* formal EU-NATO cooperation continued between the organisations at the civilian and military levels (the latter often comprising dual-hatted representatives) but with very restrictive agendas, limited mainly to the Western Balkans, and the exchange of classified information. *De facto* cooperation is however limited by the asymmetrical membership of the organisations as it relates to Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, which is why the emphasis tends to be on more pragmatic and informal modes of cooperation. The prevalent “formal non-cooperation” has contributed to the lack of “respective strategic specificity” (Duke and Vanhoonacker 2015, p. 153) between the two organisations. However, the twin shocks imparted on the EU and NATO by the Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008, and subsequently, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the destabilisation of the Donbass region, have put renewed pressure on both to inject “new impetus and new substance” into their relations (EU-NATO Declaration: 2016).

NATO responded to “this changed security environment by enhancing its deterrence and defence posture, including by a forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, and by suspending all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia [...]” (NATO 2016b). NATO also enhanced its security ties with Finland and Sweden to reassess security in the Baltic Sea, a Readiness Action Plan was agreed to in 2014 at the Alliance's Wales summit, complete with a 5,000 strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)

within the NATO Response Force (NRF).<sup>4</sup> The downing of MH17 in July 2014 made the task of those favouring quiet and patient diplomacy far more difficult. Air defences were boosted since 2014 with six allies responding to the demand for air-to-ground precision guided munitions. Sixteen allies, led by Germany, is “establishing larger formations to deliver usable forces and capabilities” (NATO 2016b).

A U.S.-European Reassurance Initiative in June 2016 included agreement to rotate an Armoured Brigade Combat Team as well as pre-positioned stocks in the Baltic States. The Viségrad Group is to provide a rotational presence in the Baltic states from 2017, while the UK is in the process of creating a Joint Expeditionary Force with Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway. This will complement the UK-France Combined Joint Expeditionary Force which held its first exercises in 2016. Further initiatives, such as a multinational letter of intent for cooperation on the provision of Airborne Electronic Attack suggest that the Nordic-Baltic region will continue to be a priority for the forthcoming years (see further Saxi 2017).

Elsewhere in Brussels, the Ukraine crisis struck the EU at an extremely vulnerable time, as it was buffeted by a financial crisis, followed soon thereafter by a migration crisis and the rise of xenophobia and populism in much of western Europe. The events unfolding between the Russian incursions into Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 also coincided with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the subsequent introduction of the multi-hatted High Representative/Vice-President as well as the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS). An attempt by the EU to relaunch the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2015 came too late to have a substantive impact on the situation. The ENP, and with it the EU’s Eastern Partnership (EaP), now had to contend with the reality that borders that were designed to be deliberately fuzzy had in fact become clearly defined and militarised.<sup>5</sup>

The succession of external shocks, combined with institutional navel-gazing, led to the build-up of an existential crisis within the EU, raising fundamental questions about the bloc's regional and international role (see also Duke 2017). The initial response to the Ukraine crisis was largely outsourced to Germany and France while the organisation as a whole was somewhat marginalised in the process. The EU sought to stabilise the domestic situation in Ukraine and coordinated economic sanctions against Russia, whilst also trying to keep the doors open for dialogue with Moscow. These efforts were accompanied by encouragement for Kiev in its move towards a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement. The Maidan demonstrations had shown a strong pro-EU vocation and the EU response therefore favoured a negotiation process in Minsk, with the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine, while at the same time applying sanctions based upon the overall understanding that any solution will be political, not military.

While NATO and the EU have each played their roles, there is little to suggest that they have yet found a path out of their respective existential crises. That said, there are modest signs that “operationalising parallel procedures and playbooks for interaction” in specific areas are being operationalised, such as countering hybrid threats, cooperation on maritime issues and exercises (Council 2016). Notwithstanding diplomatic proclamations of a “new era of cooperation” between the EU and NATO, as the December 2016 Joint Declaration put it, war in Syria, Da'esh and deteriorating relationships with Turkey continue to pose complex challenges to the Euro-Atlantic security community. Brexit has created additional complications, which will occupy policy-makers and planners within both organisations for some time.<sup>6</sup> The West's obvious paucity of strategic tools with which to engage Russia is thus, on the one hand, only symptomatic of a more comprehensive set of problems. On the other hand, a deeper understanding of the factors that have led the West into this strategic impasse

with Russia can provide useful insights for the wider issues this organisational relationship is facing.

### **Conceptualising the strategic deadlock with Russia**

Leading up to the events of 2014, both the EU and NATO had been repeating their liberalist mantras of soft power and multilateralism while moving towards association agreements and deep and comprehensive free trade agreements. Enhanced relations with the EU's and NATO's Eastern partners, including Georgia and Armenia, have been perceived by the Kremlin as geopolitical moves increasingly at variance with key Russian interests in its heterogenous and diverse "inner abroad". Arguably, this led to a sort of "integration dilemma" which Charap and Troitskiy (2013, p. 50) have proposed as a prism for examining NATO's enlargement and the EU's engagement in the Eastern Partnership<sup>7</sup> and the effects these had on the relationship with Russia:

[...] one state perceives as a threat to its own security or prosperity its neighbours' integration into military alliances or economic groupings that are closed to it. This exclusivity is the source of the dilemma: it transforms integration, a positive-sum process by definition, into a zero-sum game for the state that is excluded from the integration initiatives offered to its neighbours. As with the security dilemma, the intentions of the neighbours or the backers of integration initiatives need not be hostile to the state in question for an integration dilemma to materialise.

Even if actions are not intended to produce outward-facing effects at all, they may even be perceived as direct threats by those excluded from the integration effort. This may lead to defensive acts on the part of those who feel threatened to restore the *status quo ante*, including through offensive, military means. The attendant sense of uncertainty drives threat perceptions and eventually leads to the construction of threats on both sides, undermining not only the original integration in question but also the scope for further integration. Much like in a security dilemma (see Jervis 1978), the zero-sum logic of the integration dilemma captures the principal

partners in an “escalatory spiral” while placing those who are the object of various integration schemes in limbo (Charap and Troitskiy 2013, p. 60).

Charap and Troitskiy’s (2013) “integration dilemma” is a variant of the security dilemma with the point of contention lying in the “exclusivity” (and thus perceived rebuttal) associated with membership of the EU or NATO. In the Waltzian defensive realist variant of the “security dilemma” (Waltz 1979) the enlargement of NATO (under the agreement of all major European states) and associated measures, such as ballistic missile defences, or the bolstering of the Alliance’s military presence in the Baltic states as measures provoking and requiring adequate responses on the part of Russia to maintain strategic balance: the buttressing of Russia’s military expenditure, and Putin’s defensive westward deployment of military forces can all be framed that way. That said, defensive realism offers less of a straightforward explanation for Russia’s armed intervention in Crimea and eastern Ukraine; following Van Evera’s (1999) idea of abrupt balancing, for a *status quo* oriented power like Russia, forward aggression constitutes more of an exceptional move, and one that bears the risk of self-defeat. In this sense, Russia had to turn to aggression temporarily to intimidate its western neighbours and thereby prevent more robust action in the future but Putin would eventually nevertheless recognise the more beneficial long-term effects of defensive balancing.

Meanwhile, offensive realist John Mearsheimer (2014) suggested that “Putin’s pushback should have come as no surprise”, neither in principle nor in terms of his specific tactical approach. The annexation of Crimea was clearly aimed at pre-empting potential secession and the loss of key military bases. Moreover, it was a direct reaction and response to US and European leaders’ attempts “to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia’s border” (p. 77), a spiral logic that can of course be easily reversed to explain as well as justify NATO’s vigorous response ever since (see further below). Putin would – and will – continue to seek opportunities for confrontation, and use the deterrent effect of the threat of further



forward aggression in short, defensive and offensive variants of the security dilemma differ in their assumptions about the desirable and more effective way of securing a state's interests: through defensive balancing on the one hand and aggressive forward expansion and conquest on the other. The question is then whether NATO's specific response, too, was simply the manifestation of such a "security dilemma" or whether it was based on a focused, strategic assessment of specific situational imperatives ("risks"). The following section will explore these two competing explanations before we return to a discussion of how an "integration dilemma" might indeed have evolved between the West and Russia.

### **A classic security dilemma?**

Although events in Ukraine following the Maidan protests in 2014 saw the initial western reactions concentrate upon diplomatic measures, restrictive instruments and economic sanctions, Russian military aggression against NATO members appeared plausible. The sizeable Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia are but one commonly cited pretext for various types of hybrid intervention to nominally protect ethnic Russians (Lanoszka 2016; Posener 2016). Although there was no firm evidence in the public domain to actually prove any such Russian hostile intent vis-à-vis the Baltic States and Poland, the implied threat fed readily into specific historical resentment against Russia in the Baltic states and more general Cold War biases elsewhere. Even in the absence of any proven Russian hostile intention, a tapestry of reports resulting from the Donbass region and Russia's proxy involvement, along with large-scale Russian military exercises and repositioning of forces on NATO's northern littoral, lend ready credence to the supposition (see also Monaghan 2015).

Hypothetical war scenarios were given weight in particular by the U.S. Senate which drew a direct line from the annexation of Crimea, to Russia's meddling in east Ukraine, to an imminent risk to the Baltic states. The Russia Aggression Prevention Act in May 2014 contained not only extensive recommendations for sanctions, but also to accelerate BMD

efforts, to increase NATO armed support for the Baltic states, intelligence support to Ukraine regarding Russian military movements and that major non-ally status should be accorded to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine which included possible “transfer of defense articles or defense services” (U.S. Senate 2014).

One of the most influential, if alarmist, vindicators was a RAND Report which suggested that Tallinn and Riga could be overrun by Russian forces within 60 hours. The report concluded, “As currently postured, NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its most exposed members” (Shlapak and Johnson 2016, p. 4). A programme screened on BBC in February 2016, entitled “World War Three: Inside the War Room” was based on a hypothetical scuffle at a Soviet war memorial in Tallinn. This was followed by discontent about the lack of self-determination in Latvia and balaclava wearing figures removing Latvian and EU flags in an eastern region which became a kind of Baltic Donbass, with fingers nervously poised over nuclear buttons. The similarities with “real life” images emerging from the Ukraine’s east, plus the reversion to Cold War stereotypes, lent credence to the notion of an imminent threat, as did repeated infractions by Russia of NATO air and sea space, sometimes without transponders on (Reuters 2016). Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and subsequent military actions in Ukraine and large scale short-notice military exercises near or on NATO borders with 30-80,000 troops, provided a further rationale for a reassessment of the collective defence of NATO’s eastern flank, or the Nordic-Baltic region.<sup>8</sup> Above all, it sparked intense debate about whether and how NATO could, or would, respond to any such unfolding threat.

A decision in 2016 for a one-time four-fold increase in the U.S. defence budget for Europe in 2017, from \$789 million in 2015, to \$3.4 billion, was made in light of American concerns about a “revanchist” Russia and as part of a “European Reassurance Initiative” (House of Representatives: 2017, p. 453). The extra spending will be directed towards stockpiling tanks, artillery and training in the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Germany, Poland and

Romania. The proposal formally retains the U.S. military presence in Europe at 60,000 and the extra 4,000 troops (an armoured brigade) on rotational deployment. The rotational forces will be backed up by the larger rapid reaction force of 40,000. Some allies, like Poland, demanded a permanent military presence but this was balanced against the wider concern about provoking Moscow and possible violation of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act which bans NATO from establishing permanent military bases in Central Europe.

In spite of the rotational nature of NATO's deployments to the Baltic states, Russia portrayed this as a violation of the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act. Exercises in April 2017, described as routine from NATO's perspective, were seen as a threat to Russia by Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Aleksey Meshkov, that "gravely increase the risk of incidents" based on an erroneous 'Russia threat' myth" (Gorka 2017). No matter how vigorously NATO issues counter-claims and denials, perceptions remain the key drivers of the security dilemma.

Prospects for NATO-Russia deconfliction are hard to ascertain, especially when Russia has "breached the values, principles and commitments which underpin the NATO-Russia relationship, as outlined in the 1997 Basic Document of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council" (NATO 2016b). Dialogue is not only complicated by the annexation of Crimea, but also by the non-recognition of the treaties signed between Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, its non-observance of treaties such as the INF treaty, military presence and actions in Syria on behalf of the Assad regime and its ongoing military build-up in the Black Sea. From the Russian perspective the 2016 National Security Strategy portrays NATO as a strategic threat to the homeland through its superiority in high-precision and long-range conventional strike capabilities, nuclear weapons, missile defences and other kinetic and non-kinetic forms of warfare (Sokolsky 2017, p. 3). Even when it comes to popular western fears of "hybrid warfare", the Kremlin likely sees democracy promotion as a form of western hybrid warfare

against Russia and its allies (potentially an indication of another dimension of a looming “integration dilemma”). The same applies to cyber warfare (Sokolosky 2017, p. 4).

Although there may well be an element of political grandstanding in such Russian perceptions, cruise missile strikes against targets at Shayrat airbase in Syria by U.S. warships in the Eastern Mediterranean have reinforced the impression that, according to Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, U.S. strikes were one step away from clashing with Russia’s military (Reuters 2017).

To return to Charap and Troitskiy’s “integration dilemma” the exclusivity that stems from membership or close(r) association with the EU or NATO, and not Russia, is the key issue. But, whilst acknowledging that the integration dilemma is a variant of the security dilemma, the question still remains of how the respective concepts differ and how they are distinguishable in practice. Is one part and parcel of the other? Is it possible for the West to be caught in an integration dilemma without necessarily being in a security dilemma and vice versa? What are the implications of greater differentiation between the dilemmas for EU, NATO and Russia relations?

### **A security dilemma and/or an integration dilemma?**

In their (2013) treatment of the “integration dilemma”, Charap and Troitskiy (2013) do not account for the types of “integration” mooted respectively by NATO and the EU. Both organisations have expanded to the east and thus into the Russian sphere of influence, but there is a difference in the nature of NATO’s enlargement and that of the EU’s post-2004 engagement with what became the EaP. Our discussion proceeds on the assumption that recognition of such a distinction may be key to unravelling the intricacies that have led each organisation into the geostrategic situation they now find themselves in.

The establishment of a Permanent Joint Council in NATO in 1997, which was then followed by a NATO-Russia Council in 2002, reinforced the idea that the Alliance had been acting with at least some sensitivity towards Russia. The honouring of the understanding that there should be no permanent military forces deployed in the post-Soviet NATO members, or the change in deployment of land-based ballistic missile defence systems in the Czech Republic and Poland to seaborne platforms, were seen as further signs of accommodation. However, as a collective defence alliance NATO's enlargement still tends to be perceived in military and (hard) security terms rather than in (soft) political terms.

Specific interactions with Russia in the context of discussions about a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia and Ukraine at the Alliance's summit in Bucharest in April 2008 revealed the acute sensitivity of Russia towards potential NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, which was invoked as justification for Russia's subsequent aggression in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (see Allison 2008). MAPs had been essential in preparing the entry of seven countries for full NATO membership in 2004. The strongest backing for a MAP for Georgia and Ukraine was particularly strong from the administration of George W. Bush while many NATO allies, especially Germany, Italy and Spain, opposed on the grounds of potential Russian responses. Hence, the supposition that discussion of a MAP would lead to eventual full membership was reasonable enough and, given the mandate of NATO, contributed to a deepening of the integration and security dilemmas.

By way of contrast, the nature of the EU's engagement in Eastern Europe was framed in the context of closer association but, importantly, excluded full membership (to the frustration of a number of partner countries).<sup>9</sup> The EU's main tool for engagement instead consists of deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTA). These involve the adoption of a significant portion of the *acquis communautaire* by partner countries "thereby integrating them into the EU's economic-legal space and diverting trade away from other

partners, including Russia” (Charap and Troitskiy 2013) but the level of commitment still fundamentally differs from the mutual extension of collective defence guarantees involved in NATO accession.<sup>10</sup>

The technically astute might argue that the EU’s Association Agreements contain security components but these are mainly concerned with commitments to participate in CSDP missions and operations. If, by extension, it is then argued that the EU also suffers from a security dilemma, the counter-factual has to be asked: if indeed the EU is a threat to Russia’s key security interests, why has Russia itself contributed to a number of CSDP missions, such as in EUFOR Tchad/RCA in 2008-9 (with heavy airlift capacity) and in the EU police mission (EUPM) in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 2002 onwards?

When initially unveiled in 2003, the ENP concentrated on Europe’s immediate eastern neighbours, backed by the assumption that Russia would eventually want to be involved as such a “neighbour” as well. The presence of the EU as Russia’s largest market, and of Russia as the third trading partner for the EU, was assumed to be the bedrock of EU-Russia relations and the basis on which the Union and its members would deepen their relations with its direct eastern neighbours. The presence of the EU as Russia’s largest market, and of Russia as the third trading partner for the EU, was assumed to be the bedrock of EU-Russia relations and the basis on which the Union and its members would deepen its relations with its direct eastern neighbours. This was, in retrospect, a rather clumsy and overly Eurocentric approach considering that a politically self-confident Russia would very likely not appreciate being assigned the role of a satellite to the European project. Thus, instead of becoming directly involved in the ENP, Russia assumed a special status built around the EU-Russia Common Spaces based on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) of 1994. The signing of the PCA was, by coincidence, the year in which President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, first suggested the notion of a Eurasian Union. Although the gestation of what eventually became

the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) was lengthy, it is worth noting conceptually it pre-dates ENP by a decade. Interestingly, there is nothing in the official documentation to suggest that the EU saw the emergence of the EEU as posing a reverse integration dilemma that would lead to zero-sum outcomes (in spite of the legal exclusion that would apply to the other if associated with either one).

EU relations with Russia at the time were complicated by the European Commission's preference for the four "common spaces" to move in parallel as part of a comprehensive framework, while Russia preferred progress based on mutual interest and dialogue on their shared neighbourhood (Trenin 2014). The "common spaces" were unveiled at the St Petersburg summit in May 2003 where the EU and Russia confirmed their determination to strengthen what was described as a "strategic partnership" – hardly the language associated with security dilemmas (Council 2004). The early years of ENP were unpromising, with the first major relaunch of the policy taking place in 2006. The EaP did then not appear until 2009, at the suggestion of the Polish and Swedish foreign ministers, and as EU-Russia relations had stalled over negotiations to update the 1994 PCA.

The concerted European approach of the six EaP members (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) may suggest the appearance of an "everything but Russia" bloc but they are marked by enormous differences in perspective and enthusiasm for moving closer to the EU (Charap and Troitskiy 2013, 53). Belarus has traditionally kept the EaP at arm's length with little enthusiasm for the EU's normative dialogue, especially when it comes to democracy or the rule of law. Azerbaijan is also unenthusiastic about EU efforts to bolster civil society or for discussions on human rights. The economic buoyancy provided through its oil wealth has also contributed to its lacklustre embrace of the EU.

Until relatively recently, Russia's reactions to the EaP did not suggest the emergence, let alone the hardening of relationship in the sense of an integration dilemma. Putin even remained relaxed in response to Armenia's 2013 intentions to sign an Association Agreement and DCFTA until pressure was exerted by Putin himself for Armenia to accede to the EEU. An integration dilemma as described by Charap and Troitskiy has developed more recently, primarily concerning Ukraine and, to an extent, Georgia and Moldova. Ukraine was well aware of the possibility of an integration dilemma, even prior to Maidan, which might have required a choice to be made "between either Western integration or a pro-Russia one" (Penkova 2013). President Viktor Yanukovich tried to balance the EU and Russia with, on the one hand, the choice of Brussels as his first official visit and, on the other, signing the Khariv Accords with Russia in 2010, which extended their lease on the Black Sea naval facilities from 2017 to 2042. Thereafter Yanukovich tried to concentrate on domestic affairs as a way of avoiding his own integration dilemma, but this proved unsuccessful since even nominally domestic matters became subject to proxy pressures (notably those stemming from the imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko and the price paid for natural gas).

Russia posited Ukraine's accession to the EEU as a direct alternative to the signature of an Association Agreement and DCFTA with the EU. The Association Agreement was eventually signed in June 2014 with some aspects of the DCFTA applying provisionally since January 2016 and a visa waiver between the EU and Ukraine for non-work related visits of up to 90 days in April 2017. These developments have undoubtedly reinforced Russian perceptions of exclusivity on the part of the EU but the main barriers to the development of EU-Russia relations stem from the sanctions imposed on Russia following the annexation of Crimea and its subsequent interference in eastern Ukraine. It is far from clear that Russia wishes to have an exclusive relationship with Ukraine, especially if this might imply assuming the costs of economic reconstruction and addressing localised corruption.



For understandable reasons the integration and security dilemmas have Ukraine as their core focus. It is though worth acknowledging the possibility of significant complications for all parties arising from the parlous state of Turkey's respective relations with the EU, NATO and Russia (see Üstün 2016). Turkish relations with the EU and NATO have been strained, especially since the referendum to modify Turkey's constitution in April 2017. This not only creates doubts about the longer-term compatibility of Turkey with the Union's core values but also challenges NATO as increasingly pragmatic but closer ties develop between Turkey and Russia.

Turkish receptivity towards Putin's proposed "Turkish Stream" gas pipeline, which blocked progress on the EU's preferred Southern Gas Corridor, is symptomatic of the state of the Union's relations with Turkey. Tentative feelers have also been directed towards Ankara about a possible Free Trade Zone with the EEU. Turning to NATO, Turkey's interest in purchasing the S-400 air defence system from Russia (and before that an inferior Chinese system) violates an unwritten rule within the Alliance that, wherever possible, systems should be either American or from the European allies for reasons of interoperability. On both counts, doubts about Turkey's strategic direction and its future political character may significantly complicate relations between Turkey, the EU and NATO on the one hand, and Russia on the other.

The argument is not that the EU, NATO and Russia are about to engage in competition over Turkey, but it is more symptomatic of the ability of President Erdogan to exploit the geopolitical (and geoeconomic) sensitivities surrounding the integration dilemma, while at the same time Turkey is anxious to escape the exclusivity that lies at the heart of the dilemma. But, by so doing, Turkey risks deepening the integration dilemma with regard to the Caucasus, with Armenia opting for the EEU, Georgia with strong preferences for the EU and Azerbaijan trying to avoid close ties with either. It is also possible that proxy integration dilemmas could surface

further afield to Central Asia. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's desire to keep all parties at arm's length might also suggest growing sensitivity to the negative consequences of the integration and security dilemmas. This suggests that longer-term stability probably lies in a wide-ranging Eurasian accommodation that goes beyond fealty to either the EU or the EEU.

One of the paradoxes of the integration dilemma is that it is no longer about actual membership of the EU or NATO, but about the perceived proxy influence that comes about through the respect *ante chambers* of the organisations. In the case of the EU this is the six EaP while for NATO it is the Partnership for Peace programme with 22 non-NATO countries. Nor is it immediately apparent that the EU suffered from a security dilemma with Russia, while NATO arguably did. The question remains, however, of whether there was any consciousness of any differences between the integration dilemma as a variant of a wider security dilemma, or were they part of a wider trans-Atlantic attempt to constrain Russia's influence to her immediate post-Cold War borders?

### **Valdai's dialogue of the deaf: liberal delusion or calculated risk?**

Early post-cold war Russian attempts to redraw "Europe as a Common Home" met with little interest from the West – especially when they were seen in some quarters as coming from a defeated country (Gorbachev 1989). The rebuff of these proposals and the emergence of what looked far from a common house coloured Putin's views of the emerging Eurasia when he assumed power in 2000. Putin viewed EU and NATO integration as linked (while formally speaking, they are not, most of the 2004 and 2007 EU members had joined NATO beforehand based upon the implicit assumption that adherence to NATO values and principles would pave the way for EU membership). Successive rounds of NATO enlargement in 1999, 2004 and 2009, incorporating the former Soviet states and parts of the Western Balkans, followed by the

EU's big bang enlargement by ten members in 2004 and more modest ones in 2007 and 2009, appeared to fundamentally redraw the political geography of Europe.

Ukraine's Orange Revolutions in late 2004 were followed by open requests from Viktor Yushchenko for a EU membership prospect in 2009 with strong popular backing. If anything, Russia was relatively restrained during the first Putin administrations but it was the prospects of an Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU that proved to be the thin end of a wedge that could eventually endanger Russia's key strategic interests vis-a-vis Ukraine and, in particular, Crimea. Russia had signed a long-term lease with Ukraine for the naval base at Sevastopol (which, aside from being the home of the Black Sea Fleet, was also host to an extensive network of airfields, missile launch sites and radar installations). Based on the assumption that NATO enlargement and EU expansion were loosely related, Russia faced the unacceptable prospect of Sevastopol being taken over by units of the US Sixth Fleet. As Sakwa (2015, p. 102) argues:

NATO may well no longer have been Russia's enemy, but the prospect of its ships, missile defence units and various other bases along Russia's borders represented a strategic defeat and existential threat of the first order.

In Russian eyes, the interlocking expansion of the EU and NATO was part of the ongoing consolidation of the asymmetrical conclusion of the Cold War following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin made it clear at the Valdai International Discussion Club in 2014 that:

We have told our American and European partners that hasty backstage decisions, for example, on Ukraine's association with the EU, are fraught with serious risks to the economy. We didn't even say anything about politics; we spoke only about the economy, saying that such steps, made without any prior arrangements, touch on the interests of many other nations, including Russia as Ukraine's main trade partner, and that a wide discussion of the issues is necessary [...] Russia does not need any kind of special, exclusive place in the world [...] we simply want for our own interests to be taken into account and for our positions to be respected. (Putin 2014)

It is easy to ascribe the apparent American tin ear regarding Russia's concerns about the emerging post-cold war international order to the administrations of George W. Bush and his neo-conservative advisors. However, such polarising difficulties were by no means confined to his administration. For instance, the decision to develop a Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) capability was made at the 2010 Lisbon Summit with an interim capability being declared two years later. The rationale was to provide full coverage and protection for NATO's European population, territory and forces from ballistic missile threats emanating from beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. In spite of remonstrations that the BMD capability "is purely defensive and not directed against Russia", it was never seen as such by Putin (NATO: 2016a). He saw it as "an attempt to destroy the strategic balance, to change the balance of forces in their favour not only to dominate, but to have the opportunity to dictate their will to all: to their geopolitical competition and, I believe, to [America's] allies as well" (Putin: 2015).

There is no doubt that the Obama administration and NATO's Secretary-General believed in their remonstrations, but what is questionable is the resistance to heed Russian warnings that NATO and EU actions were seen as essentially geopolitical in nature, even if both avowed otherwise. John Mearsheimer (2014, p. 78) referred to this kind of apparent disconnect as the "liberal delusion". He argued that:

Elites in the United States and Europe have been blindsided by events only because they subscribed to a flawed view of international politics. They tend to believe that the logic of realism holds little relevance in the twenty-first century and that Europe can be kept whole and free on the basis of such liberal principles as the rule of law, economic interdependency, and democracy.

Mearsheimer's argument suggests that the EU and NATO were pursuing post-modernist agendas, convinced of their own normative superiority and of the low likelihood of armed aggression between Russia, the EU and NATO – until Russia's aggression in Crimea and proxy involvement in Ukraine made this untenable. In this interpretation, the EU and NATO were

naïve and were unable to accept Putin's counter-narrative other than that of an unenlightened "modern" authoritarian nemesis. Alternatively, one could argue that the EU and NATO were quite aware of the geopolitical stakes. Behind the normative façade one would expect to find careful calculations of the risks linked to broader strategic goals that ultimately promoted a specific approach to global governance. There is only cursory evidence to back this up stemming from public statements, such as that emanating from NATO's 1999 New Strategic Concept, which saw the enlargement of NATO as serving "the overall political and strategic interests of the Alliance, strengthen its effectiveness and cohesion, and enhance overall European security and stability" (NATO 1999). Even the EU's offer of a "reinforced relationship, based on shared democratic values" made in its key strategic document on Russia, also adopted in 1999, could be construed as less benign and more geopolitical in nature (European Council 1999). Evidence of any such strategic purposiveness is, however, circumstantial.

It is more likely that the EU and NATO acted out of strategic naïveté rather than any grand strategic design – let alone one that was sufficiently coordinated to be termed genuinely transatlantic. Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine awoke both organisations (although the earlier intervention in Georgia should have done so) to the nature of the world on their littoral and beyond. The ending of the alleged "liberal delusion" also marked the end of the "strategic unconsciousness" of both organisations (Duke 2017). More recently the often-held normative bias of the EU has given way to "principled pragmatism" which, according to the High Representative, will "guide our external action in the years ahead" (Global Strategy 2016, p. 8). Prior to the adoption of the EUGS, in the High Representative's 2015 Strategy Review, reference was made on several occasions to the need for "nuanced realism" in the face of an increasingly complex world (EEAS 2015). Although the precise meaning of both phrases is unclear, they nevertheless suggest a change from the normatively charged language that is

commonly associated with the EU's external communication. Both documents were presaged by a review of the ENP which adopted a far more "pragmatic" tone, especially when it came to recognising that "not all partners aspire to EU rules and standards" and that there should therefore be "different ambitions, abilities and interests" (European Commission 2015, p. 4). Popular discontent within the EU also made the idea of promoting the Union as *exemplar* at the heart of its external engagement problematic.

The perceptions of the integration and security dilemmas from a Russian standpoint appear to differ between the internal and external audiences. For the internal audience the messaging is very much one of the classical security dilemma focussing, most recently, on how Montenegro's accession to NATO 'deepens the dividing lines in Europe' (Grushko: 2016). Such representation also fits Putin's wish to portray a beleaguered Russia with a strong leader who not only defends the country's geostrategic interests, but is also determined to restore its international standing.

Externally, the messaging is more careful. Putin's 2014 Valdai speech, part of which is quoted above, is careful to single out the economic dimensions of the integration dilemma. Although this is slightly disingenuous, since there are clear political considerations involved in the economic dimensions, it nevertheless reopens the question of whether a more nuanced approach to the impasse between the EU and NATO's relations with Russia, and vice versa, might not be addressed by more explicit recognition of the fact that while both organisations clearly suffer from an integration dilemma, the EU does not necessarily carry with it the baggage of a security dilemma other than via the largely overlapping membership of the two organisations.

## **Prospects for deconfliction**

The EU primarily faces an integration dilemma due to the fact that the primary means of the contested engagement with its partners to the east, or Russia's "inner abroad", is heavily trade-oriented. There are of course important nuances: the EU is not exclusively a civilian power and there are security dimensions to the agreements with the eastern neighbours. The fact that the EU's security involvement in operations fall principally outside Europe and that a number have benefitted from Ukrainian and/or Russian contributions suggests that the security dilemma stems from more local or regional considerations and does not necessarily block security cooperation elsewhere. Further mutual engagement could therefore be approached by the EU as confidence building measures in the wider process or rebuilding relations with Russia.

Much will also depend upon the extent to which there is interest on the part of the EU's Member States to promote the Union's defence-related role based upon perceptions of conditionality to the American security guarantees provided through NATO. Efforts to bolster defence expenditure and capabilities within the EU and to assume a quasi "Article 5" role within the EU could ensnare the Union in something that looks far more like a security dilemma. But, for the moment, this is not the case.

NATO, by way of contrast, is engaged in something that bears a stronger resemblance to a classical security dilemma with efforts to bolster security by one party met by reciprocal (and often asymmetrical) reactions on the other. There remains an open question about the extent to which Putin is willing to distinguish between the EU and NATO but past Russian involvement in CSDP missions suggests that there may be a margin of manoeuvre in the case of the Union that does not currently exist with the Alliance. The EU and NATO are, however, at risk of reinforcing Putin's internal messaging portraying the EU and NATO as the cause of a security dilemma with, for example, the EU-NATO Joint Declaration of July 2016 which formed part

of the Union's defence package (EU-NATO Declaration: 2016). More, not less, differentiation between the EU and NATO might therefore be helpful, but not to the extent that it would allow Putin to exploit open differences (Turkey being of concern in this regard).

Greater differentiation would allow the EU to work on reducing its integration dilemma with Russia at several levels. At the broadest level the EU will have to enter into dialogue with Russia if the notion of 'cooperative regional orders', as expressed in the Global Strategy, are to have substance, especially on the Middle East. The EU could also consider proposing bilateral and multilateral ways of cooperating in the EU's EaP and the EEU as well as in areas of growing mutual interest, like Central Asia. This would have to be done on the basis of non-exclusivity which would mean addressing thorny legal issues like whether association with both the EEU and EU is possible and, if so, under what arrangements. The extension of economic incentives should be done on the explicit respect for the independence of the parties involved so that they do not become the objects of further or new proxy struggles, the potential for which is already apparent in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Any renewed engagement by the EU with Russia should also pay close attention to Turkey with the emphasis upon economic cooperation and conflict resolution.

The largely overlapping membership of the EU and NATO suggests that the engagement of the majority of the Union's members, who are also Alliance members, will help to create a more conducive atmosphere to change the zero-sum mindsets that underpin the security dilemma where the nature of any competition is far more intractable and less prone to agreement on power-sharing solutions. Importantly, any willingness to address the EU's integration dilemma with Russia would make it more difficult to Putin to maintain that the EU and NATO are part of a classical competition for international influence fuelled by an underpinning security dilemma.



## **Conclusions**

This contribution builds upon Charap and Troitskiy's notion of the integration dilemma. They acknowledge that it is a variant of the security dilemma. We accept their argument that the EU and NATO suffer from an integration dilemma, but we note that they are of an essentially different nature. That of the EU is more closely associated with economic and trade competition, especially the proposed Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, while that of NATO is associated with cooperation on a broad range of security issues. While we acknowledge that there are clear nuances in this statement for both organisations, the underlying point is that the nature of the integration dilemmas differs.

Moreover, the "integration" that has been posited is not that of full membership, with the notable exception of the Western Balkans, some of whom are already EU and NATO members, while others are in the wings. This opens up the possibility of different forms of accommodation, short of full membership (or, "exclusivity", to use the terminology of the integration dilemma). Granted, it is precisely the current integration without membership that is the source of tension, but there are also important areas of exclusivity that risk becoming dogma (such as the incompatibility of EU and EEU membership). Efforts at accommodation, even initially symbolic, might provide positive messages for countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and even Turkey who are acutely aware of the integration dilemma and who will either exploit EU, NATO and Russian differences for their ends, or who will avoid any form of cooperation out of self-preservation.

The main conundrum in Charap and Troitskiy's integration dilemma is that they do not explore the linkages between the integration and security dilemmas or, critically, their differences. We argue that significant steps towards deconfliction might, however, be attained by the recognition that the EU and NATO both suffer from an integration dilemma with Russia, but

both do not necessarily share a security dilemma with Russia. A security dilemma is in many ways more intractable, while creative approaches to the integration dilemma on the EU's part could begin to undermine the logic of the security dilemma.

A security dilemma, fuelled by realist perspectives, will be far harder to unravel. Russia has its largest military presence in Europe since the end of the Cold War and challenges to air and sea space are almost a daily occurrence. The presence of significant forces, including nuclear munitions, is also part of a deterrence posture that is at the heart of the security dilemma. Top-down approaches aimed at addressing the security dilemma are likely to be far less successful than bottom-up approaches aimed at addressing aspects of the integration dilemma.

It will admittedly take enormous vision and courage to move towards creative solutions that share power and influence, whilst respecting the concerns and desires of the EU and Russia's neighbours (and increasingly the neighbours-of-the-neighbours). Failure to make progress on this front will cause more uncertainty and make it problematic for those who have thus far avoided the Siren calls of exclusivity to do so in the future. It is in the interests of the EU and its members to insist that an integration dilemma does not become a security dilemma. It should also be in NATO's interest since any start to unravelling their security dilemma with Russia appears to lie in first addressing the EU's integration dilemma. In spite of evidence that EU-NATO cooperation is making tentative progress, distinctiveness may not be an entirely bad thing.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> NATO's Warsaw Summit Communiqué of 8-9 July 2016, reaches 139 paragraphs.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing both have 28 members. Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden are EU members but not NATO members, while Albania, Iceland, Norway and Turkey are NATO members but not EU members (Albania is an EU candidate).

<sup>3</sup> The ambivalence surrounding EU-NATO relations often suggests polar interpretations. An Atlanticist interpretation, especially from a British perspective, might suggest that the EU, or at least its security and defence aspects, provide a useful and largely convergent “European pillar” within the Atlantic alliance. In this view, NATO is very much the primary security actor, and any autonomy claimed by the EU depends mainly upon a right of first refusal from the Alliance's principal members. These tensions were evident following the publication of the Anglo-French St Malo Declaration in December 1998. A more divergent, and historically Europeanist view, tends to stress the lack of convergence on multiple levels, ranging from membership, to mission, security versus defence, to doubts about the reliability of the U.S. and, ultimately, the implied nuclear guarantees. However, the Europeanist camp never went so far as to propose formal separation (see Zyla 2016). Even France, under de Gaulle, did not leave NATO completely but only left its Integrated Military Command.

<sup>4</sup> The VJTF is still in an interim format, with the bulk of the forces being provided by Germany, the Netherlands and Norway. The VJTF will come into full operation in 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Despite the differences in borders implied by the slightly differing membership of the EU and NATO there was no perceptible difference in the geopolitical assessment of the resulting littoral security challenges.

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<sup>6</sup> Brexit has also refuelled discussions about duplication, for example by reopening the option of an autonomous EU military command structure – a move the UK had worked against for a number of years (Biscop 2012).

<sup>7</sup> The Eastern Partnership is a joint policy initiative launched at the Prague Summit in May 2009 that aims to deepen and strengthen relations between the EU and its six Eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

<sup>8</sup> By way of comparison, NATO's Exercise *Steadfast Jazz* in November 2013 involved 6,000 personnel.

<sup>9</sup> NATO currently has four candidates for membership while the EU has five (albeit with no ambitions to consider further enlargement prior to 2019 in the latter's case).

<sup>10</sup> There are three DCFTA countries to the EU's east (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) with the first two having entered into force in July 2016. Charap and Troitskiy (2013) are correct to argue that DCFTAs imply exclusivity in the sense that participation legally prohibits engagement in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (as in the case of Armenia who is an EEU member). But, it is worth noting the voluntary nature of the Association Agreements with the EU and membership of the EEU, with a significant trimming of Putin's original ambition to create a "distinctive pole of influence in a multipolar world by reversing the 'civilised divorce' of the former Soviet republics of the USSR" (Popescu 2014, p. 7).