

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RUSSIA: A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Abstract

Currently, both the EU and NATO are experiencing a certain crisis not only in the relations with their partners, but also a number of internal tensions due to the consequences of a rapid demilitarization at the turn of the century as well as the new US policy towards its allies. In such an uncertainty, a constant dialogue is particularly important between Russia and the European Union, which would minimize the tensions associated with both the events of the recent years and the coming long-term projects. This article considers a number of problems and prospects for cooperation between the European Union and Russia in providing international security. The most productive areas for potential cooperation as well as the most relevant projects, requiring special relations and close interaction between the structures of the Russian Federation and the EU in a sense of collective security in a strategic perspective are identified.

Key words: European Union, NATO, international security, strategic partnership, Arctic.

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The last decade of the 20th century is remarkable for a number of key events that radically influenced the further course of history and changed the geopolitical situation. The fall of the Warsaw bloc, which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union during the end of the Cold War brought an unprecedented disarmament processes in exchange for the arms race. In addition to overcoming the military confrontation between East and West, of course. Now, the place of the mentioned confrontation is taken by pan-European structures and mechanisms, which entail completely different forms of interaction between states.

However, we should not forget that these events led to a certain crisis among NATO countries. The maintenance of a huge army and the presence of a significant "allied" contingent in Europe became irrelevant. In just ten years, the number of deployed units decreased to a small part

of their numbers at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Thus, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the total number of NATO deployed battalions in continental Europe in 2015 is approximately equal to that of West Germany alone in 1990 [Fig. 1].

At the same time, the North Atlantic alliance is a product of the bipolar system and therefore continues to look for "opponents", which becomes a risk factor all by itself.

The United States, while claiming the victory in the Cold War, continue to pursue a very aggressive foreign policy, actively intervening into the ongoing conflicts and starting up new ones, striving to become the only supplier of "military force solutions", which would mean its unquestionable world leadership. This is why the US foreign policy in the Middle East is rather destructive for the region. Moreover, as

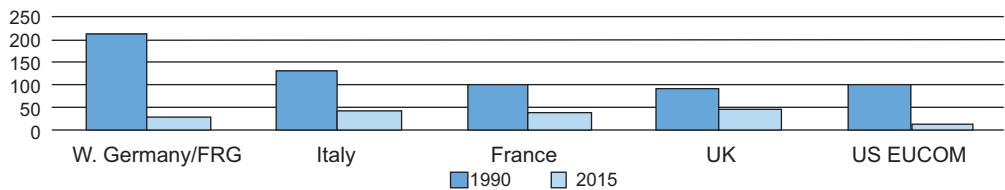


Figure 1. Number of military units in Europe (incl. US EUCOM in 1990/2015) s by IISS, The Military Balance 2016

a member of NATO, the United States actively involve European countries in implementing this policy. Thus, in 1986, during a raid on Tripoli, Germany, France, Italy and Spain did not even provide their airspace for the flight of American aircraft, soon during the war in the Persian Gulf European militaries took a very active part.

It would not seem at the first glance that there are many similarities between the events of more than thirty years ago and the current geopolitical situation. Unfortunately, there is enough. We can see that from the latest events in Syria [1; 2]. Therefore, the relevance of the interaction with the EU on security issues did not decrease at all, but simply acquired new forms, in line with the current agenda of international relations.

So, currently we can observe the formation of a new European defense identity: instead of the formula of NATO since 1996 Berlin Summit comes a new understanding of responsibility, corresponding to the Common Foreign and Security policy (CFSP). At the same time, the EU countries would like to continue to optimize their defense spending by “outsourcing” of the part of the duties from the US military. The latter, in turn, are not inclined to altruism [3] and it is likely that soon Europe will have to take on new spending [4].

It is obvious that EU countries see Russia (besides international terrorism) as the only potential threat in Europe, which, incidentally, is already declared in clear text. Sweden (which, in fact, has not fought a single war for more than two centuries), is particularly concerned, even though it is not a member of NATO, but a part of the CFSP [5].

In this situation, when Russian Federation is not only demonized, but clearly perceived as “Enemy No. 1” in Europe, cooperation with the EU in the scope of international security appears particularly important, although full of pitfalls and contradictions.

While the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and the early Russian Federation focused, mostly, on the USA, then such events as the Yugoslav crisis, NATO enlargement and the ambiguous foreign policy of the United States itself led to the change of priorities.

Since the end of the 1990s, Russia’s foreign policy aims at interaction with Europe, which became the main priority (after the CIS countries, of course). Moreover, the change in the political vector also contributed to the improvement of economic relations: the EU has become one of Russia’s largest trading partners, which is an important indicator in assessing of the international security.

Ironically, it was the rise of international terrorism at the beginning of the 21st century that served as a new start for strengthening cooperation between the Russian Federation and EU in international security. By that time Russian security forces had accumulated considerable experience in countering terrorists.

It should be noted that significant mutual understanding was achieved in this field: it was the antiterrorist coalition, which included Germany, France and Russia, that strictly condemned Washington’s behavior during the 2002–2003 Iraq crisis when it became clear that there was no WMD in Iraq as such. Such a behavior was especially atypical for Germany, which for the first time ever went to confrontation

with the US, calling for a peaceful solution through the UN Security Council.

Despite the cautious attitude to the CFSP in Russia, one must admit that a new military organization is gradually emerging in Europe, most members of which are also members of NATO. At the same time, the EU security policy (at least for now) is not positioned as an alternative to the Alliance. On the contrary, realizing the limitations of its resources, even to ensure collective defense, the EU tries to use the strength of the bloc as much as possible in case of threat.

It is obvious, that in spite of disagreements arising among the EU members recently, security issues remain one of the most urgent for the consolidation of participants and for the preservation of this structure as a significant political force that can defend its interests not only in Europe but also in other regions. The anti-crisis potential accumulated to achieve this goal is aimed specifically at maintaining relations with other countries in which the EU can act as a guarantor of fulfilling certain obligations, in other words, to have an *independent* political component. It is the independence of the European Union in solving of foreign policy problems ensuring international security that can be considered a key for the effectiveness of the CFSP.

It remains an open question how the anti-crisis forces of the two organizations: NATO and the EU will get along, because at the moment the EU does not have the necessary resources to carry out major international operations. For instance, according to the recent inspection, in the 9th Tank Brigade of the Bundeswehr, making which is a part of the rapid reaction force, out of 44 Leopard-2 tanks only 9 are serviced and ready to deploy and out of 14 Marder-2 infantry fighting vehicles only 3 are combat ready (!) [6]. It is also noted that the German Air Force is able to carry out combat duty only 4 months a year. Ground forces of the Federal Republic of Germany are underfunded as well [7]. Such

is the army of one of the most influential countries of the European Union.

Under the circumstances, the main scope of the EU's security operations can only be the implementation of preventive measures or peacekeeping operations, including direct military participation of a limited force. For example, in Europe, there is much room for the improvement of police units capable of operating in conflict zones. Due to the growing terrorist threat, more and more attention is paid to such units even on the territory of the participating countries themselves. Apparently, domestic conflicts are the highest priority for the EU, as evidenced indirectly by the increased role of police/anti-terrorist forces and assets, which affects their size and funding. [8]

One way or another, in the light of the impairment of the relations between the US and the EU, there is no doubt that the European Union will consistently build up its own anti-crisis forces within the common security policy. By the mid-2000s, such organizations as the European Union's Military Staff and its Rapid Reaction Force (EUFOR) have managed to carry out a number of operations in close cooperation with NATO, as well as some independent ones, for example, controlling refugee flows through the Mediterranean Sea (since 2015 up to this day).

Despite a number of contradictions connected with the «Lisa Case», the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, «Skripal Case», etc., complicating Russia's interaction with European structures, the EU remains open to cooperation in the field of security.

However, to what extent is this interaction justified and appropriate, considering the above-described incidents and their consequences?

Now, Russia-EU cooperation relies on, in fact, not so much common values or the similarity of social systems, common long-term goals, etc., but on mere common economic interests. Russia is seen as a reliable partner in resolving energy

issues. That's the reason why Germany is very supportive of the construction of the «Nord Stream–2». This is neither a political action, nor a manifestation of mutual respect and trust, but a simple operational action aimed at the optimization of gas transit costs and minimizing the risks associated with the political situation in the transfer countries. For Russia, however, the construction of the same gas pipeline has much more political value, because these “limited partnership” relations with Europe are directly dependent on the effectiveness of economic cooperation.

The further development of partnership in joint efforts in other areas can be more prospective and can be a basis for creating a truly *strategic* partnership. It is important that these potential relations concern, among other things, the international security. Transparency in this matter will help not only to remove the label of threat from Russia, but also to stabilize relations in other fields, including improving the coordination of international operations in both the Middle East and Central Africa, the traditional area of European responsibility, which has recently been drowning more and more Russian attention [9].

However, the cooperation of Europe and Russia is one of the promising courses, since the European independence is highly dependent of its attitude to Russia. This applies not only to the energy or, for example, military aspect, but also to the international politics, for without stability in Russia, European stability is rather questionable. It is obvious not only to the “hawks” in European governments. The stability of the Russian political system is one of the key aspects of European security. Furthermore, taking into account the fact that internal threats, making up the main risks to the political regime in Russia, often have external support (the experience of the Arab Spring and the political crisis in Ukraine), close cooperation with the EU can be a top priority for Moscow.

Undoubtedly, in current conditions, increasing of the Russian Federation's

political influence and strengthening of its positions in the international politics is impossible without a mutually beneficial strategic partnership with the European Union. However, on the way to achieving this goal, lack of mutual understanding (let alone the common vision of strategic perspective) between the parties imposes many obstacles. One of the ways to «break the ice» and exercise such strategic cooperation may be the “Arctic project”.

Most likely, in the coming decades the development of the Arctic will become one of the key points not only of Russian-European, but also of general international relations. Even the UK, which is on the eve of its «Brexit», is actively preparing to take an active part in this process [10].

European sanctions will inevitably result negatively on Russia's Arctic plans. The suspension of exports of technologies and equipment for the development of the deep-water shelf will hit hard on the domestic oil sector, as the share of imported equipment in Russian oil and gas production now reaches 25%, and in projects on the sea shelf approaches 100%. According to the international rating agency Fitch, in the medium term these restrictions can not only affect the economic feasibility of oil production, but also completely prevent the implementation of a number of large-scale projects for the development of Arctic oil fields unless Russia can develop its own technologies. The Ministry of Energy of Russia, however, believes that these technologies may appear in Russia by 2020 [11].

In the upcoming “Battle for the Arctic” Russia has an important trump card — access to the Northern Sea Route, which is the shortest sea route from the Asia-Pacific region to Europe. Despite the fact that due to the laboriousness of shipping along this route, it is not yet considered a viable alternative to the habitual transit through the Suez Canal. Climate change leading to an increase in the average annual temperature facilitates navigation of the NSR from year to year. Currently navigation without icebreakers is possible

only two months a year — in August and September. This transport artery could be a great help, for example, in the export of hydrocarbons to the markets of Asian countries, since the northern path is shorter by more than 7 thousand nautical miles than the “Indian” one.

The economic potential of such a project is huge: in the early 2020s, China intends to channel up to 15% of its giant foreign trade turnover with the countries of Europe along the Russian Arctic coast. Considering the fact that Russia is already preparing a bill suggesting the transit of goods on the NSR only by ships under the Russian flag, this could be a powerful economic motive for the development of the region, as well as strengthening of Russian positions in the Arctic.

The development of industrial infrastructure of the Russian Arctic zone, as well as the cooperation with countries such as Finland (one of the main partners in shipbuilding, which carries out several current projects) and Norway (one of the few countries with deepwater drilling and production technologies) will not only increase cargo turnover on the Northern Sea Route, but will also strengthen the status of the Russian Federation as a reliable partner in implementing long-term projects.

As shown by the wide experience of the energy projects implemented by Russia, the economic integration is the foundation of international stability. The coming “trade wars” between the US and the

EU can seriously reformat the system of international relations. It is possible that we will see a weakening of Washington’s influence on political decision-making in Europe rather soon. However, this will depend mostly on the political will of the leaders of European states, who in the past have shown enviable “flexibility” in answering the quite unambiguous rhetoric of transatlantic neighbor.

In case the EU demonstrates its independence in resolving such issues, the rapid development of Russian-European cooperation in key regions such as the Arctic and the Middle East is more than possible. The lifting of sanctions and the implementation of joint projects, no doubt, could bring mutual benefit to both sides.

Within the European Union there evidently may be at least 28 different opinions on the same issue. However, in issues concerning Russia, one must remember that this country, despite being (primarily geographically) part of Europe, has a number of features that do not allow its complete integration into the “European home”. Strictly speaking, no one expects that on either side. This must be taken for granted despite the outright hostility of a number of Eastern European states. Moreover, it proves to be of very little significance due to the fact that Russia had been having rich and complex relations with the “core” of the EU for many centuries.

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