

141st Bergedorf Round Table

Russia's Responsibility in Global Affairs

October 24–26, 2008, Moscow

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

This summary contains those points of the discussion which we consider to be of particular importance in the current political debate. It contains sections of the discussion in which Sergey Lavrov, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, took part, and is naturally selective. An edited and authorised version of the complete discussion will be published in 141st Bergedorf Protocol.

I. Russia as global player

Russian participants emphasised that as Russia grows stronger, it wishes to assume more responsibility on an international scale. This would entail relinquishing political and economic egoism and, as part of a “collective leadership”, would mean improving the management of international processes. For this precise reason Russia wanted to be regarded as an equal partner who should not be treated with undue mistrust. Nor could it always be presupposed that it would adopt views diametrically opposed to those of the U.S. Fears of a new arms race or of the possibility of Russian territorial claims on the Crimea were unfounded. Russia did not have a geopolitical agenda, though it did have privileged interests when it came to its nearest neighbours. This was the same with the EU—in its neighbourhood policy it was pursuing its privileged interests, which Russia was willing to accept.

II. European security

A new European security architecture?

The participants failed to reach agreement on whether or not the international financial crisis and the crisis in Georgia made it necessary to reorder the whole of the international system. However, they did agree that joint efforts would have to be made in order to prevent instability and crises in the future; strategic isolation was not a viable option. In this respect many of the participants considered the current European security architecture to be insufficient, partly because it did not include Russia. The existing structures of cooperative security had not been particularly successful. For this reason the Russian side took up President Medvedev's proposal for a treaty on Euro-Atlantic security, with the help of which the unity of European civilisation linking the EU, Russia and the U.S. could be restored. NATO, the EU and the CIS should also be participants in

the new security architecture, which would include all the OSCE countries. Some European participants thought that the EU and the U.S. should accept this offer. Others criticised the fact that the principles of the proposal were already familiar, that its implementation was unclear, and that a legally binding entity consisting of Russia and the EU was an illusion. An alternative suggestion was a high-ranking triangular format consisting of the U.S., the EU and Russia. The proposal mooted by a Russian participant that there should be an alliance between the EU and Russia capable of standing up to the power of the U.S. or China was rejected by the European side.

The crisis in Georgia and the frozen conflicts

Russian participants blamed the Georgian government for the escalation in Georgia. The crisis had demonstrated that conflicts could not be resolved by force. It was the net result of long-term developments which the EU had chosen to ignore. At the same time it presented an opportunity to reorder Russia's relationship with the EU. As a result of President Sarkozy's initiative one could now turn to the problem of stabilising the region. Other participants accused Russia of having lured Georgia into a trap, and called for an international investigation of what had happened. With regard to dealing with frozen conflicts in general, the participants all agreed that the requisite formats for resolving them existed. However, producing a thaw in the conflicts in a positive sense would only become possible if the issue of European security was also on the agenda. The status quo of these conflicts was a self-contained problem which needed to be discussed. A participant commented that a final resolution of the frozen conflicts was not a very realistic prospect, and that for this reason one should think more about reducing their escalation potential.

Russia and NATO

The Russian side asked NATO not to "punish" Russia for the Georgia crisis by suspending joint activities, e.g. the NATO-Russia Council. Russia would like to be able to rely on NATO as a partner, though currently it was NATO which was actually destabilising the international situation. For Russia the enlargement of NATO represented an existential threat, and it would do everything in its power to prevent it.

European participants agreed that whenever Western and Russian security interests overlapped, it would be apposite to avoid unilateral steps. For this reason NATO would have to talk to Russia about the accession of Ukraine and Georgia, and under certain circumstances would also have to offer NATO membership to Russia. The opportunity for this had existed in the 1990s, though it had not been seized.

III. Joint options for taking action in Iran, in Central Asia and in Afghanistan

Iran

There was disagreement about possible cooperation between Russia and the West on the Iran issue. Whereas some considered this to be an opportunity to demonstrate a joint assumption of responsibility, others believed that the options for joint action were negligible, since the strategic interests involved were too disparate. Thus Russia had for a long time been sending signals to Iran which differed from those of the UN Security Council, above all with regard to the idea of setting up a gas OPEC, even if its implementation seems fairly unlikely. Some participants called on the West to change its strategy towards Iran. Instead of asking for an end to uranium enrichment, there should be strict supervision of the programme. Russia and the West should make it clear to Iran that it would have overstepped the mark if it decided to opt out of the NPT treaty. Europe should coordinate its position with Russia without waiting to receive the assent of a new U.S. administration. Russian participants demanded that no country should take unilateral action with regard to this or other issues, and stated that they were in favour of direct talks between Iran and the U.S.

Central Asia and Afghanistan

The greatest challenge in Central Asia was deemed to be security and not energy. Extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking were having a severe destabilising effect on the region. At the same time the illiteracy rate was increasing, and a large part of the younger generation was migrating to Russia. Participants from Europe emphasised that the EU did not want a new Great Game, but wished to make a contribution to stabilising the region. Russia was grateful for this, and had supported the presence of the EU from the start. Potential for cooperation between Russia and the EU existed with regard to drugs issues and border and water management. With regard to energy, there were calls for Central Asia to diversify its energy exports. One participant regretted that Russia and the EU did not view the states of the region as partners, but merely as objects of their energy interests. Some saw the SCO moving towards the status of a political organisation, whereas others argued that expectations of a “Eurasian NATO” were exaggerated, since the interests of the SCO members were too diverse. One Russian participant asked the EU not to interfere in the SCO. With regard to Afghanistan, Russian participants bewailed the fact that, since the Tokyo conference in 2002, Russia had been marginalised in Afghanistan. However, Russia would not be gratified if the NATO mission in Afghanistan were to be failure.

Imprint

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