

141st Bergedorf Round Table

Russia's Responsibility in Global Affairs

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Commentary on the speech of Sergey Lavrov, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, by Ruprecht Polenz, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag

Russia thinks of itself as being the third pillar of European civilisation, after the EU and the U.S., and would like to be part of a Euro-Atlantic security order. In his speech Lavrov, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, combined this central message with remarkable statements about Russia's willingness to assume responsibilities on an international scale. The stronger Russia becomes, the greater will be its accountability for what happens in the world. By relinquishing its egoism (!), Russia hopes to make a contribution to the management of international processes, and sees itself as part of a "collective leadership".

With this Lavrov has spelt out in greater detail President Medvedev's proposals for a treaty on Euro-Atlantic security to be concluded between Russia, the U.S. and the EU.

The EU and the U.S. should respond in a constructive manner to this proposal. It will only prove possible to silence the increasingly vocal advocates of Russian imperial might, who voice their views even in Moscow, if the West is clearly willing to treat Russia as a partner in its security deliberations and to discuss suitable ways of incorporating it into common security structures.

Whether a new treaty is needed in order to incorporate Russia into Euro-Atlantic security structures is doubtful. As an answer to the Russian proposals the West should recall an offer which President Clinton made to Yeltsin in the middle of the 1990s, when he invited Russia to become a member of NATO.

It is time to renew this offer. Such a step, more than anything else, would make it clear that NATO in the year 2008 is a different Alliance to the one which existed in 1988. Russia is developing into a democracy based on the rule of law in order to comply with the admission criteria. If it were to become a member, the Alliance would be in an excellent position to deal with the tasks that confront it in the 21st century as Euro-Atlantic security organisation.

Imprint

Coordination	Dr. Klaus Wehmeier, Dr. Thomas Paulsen
Editor	Bernhard Müller-Härlin
Contact	www.bergedorf-round-table.org

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