

Facilitating Cooperation in a World of Uncertainty

GCRF COMPASS Policy Paper

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COMPASS: Comprehensive Capacity-Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood and Central Asia: research integration, impact governance & sustainable communities



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GCRF COMPASS Principal Investigator:

Elena Korosteleva, Professor of International Politics, and Director, Global Europe Centre, University of Kent

Managing Editor:

Oybek Madiyev, GCRF COMPASS Research Associate (WP3 lead), University of Kent

Contributors:

Yauheni Preiherman, COMPASS Research Associate, Belarusian State University team, and Founder and Director of the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations

Alla Leukavets, Project Writer/Manager, Department of International Projects and Programmes at the Belarusian State University, GCRF COMPASS Project Affiliate and Analyst at the Centre for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies in Minsk, Belarus

Paul Hansbury, GCRF COMPASS Project Affiliate and Associate Fellow with the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations

Zachary Paikin, GCRF COMPASS Project Affiliate and Member of the Expert Council of the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations

The COMPASS project:

[GCRF COMPASS project](#) (ES/P010849/1, 2017-21) is an ambitious UK government capacity-building funding initiative, aiming to extend UK research globally and to address the challenges of growth and sustainability in developing countries. Notably, the COMPASS project led by the University of Kent, in partnership with the University of Cambridge, seeks to establish the ‘**hubs of excellence**’ at the top-level Higher Education Institutions in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, to enable them to become the centres for knowledge-sharing and transfer for **research integration, impact governance, and sustainable communities**.

The Minsk Dialogue:

[The Minsk Dialogue](#) was launched as a Track-II initiative focused on international affairs and security in Eastern Europe in early 2015. In April 2019, it was registered as the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations. The Minsk Dialogue’s mission is to offer an open and geopolitically unbiased platform for research and discussion on international affairs and security in Eastern Europe. Regular Minsk Dialogue events gather international experts, as well as high-level officials and diplomats. The Minsk Dialogue’s team and its expert network produce analytical reports, policy papers, commentaries, backgrounders, and conference non-papers, which are widely distributed among the relevant international stakeholders.

The Minsk forum, held on 7-9 October 2019, addressed security challenges for Europe. Various stakeholders, state and non-state, offered their views on these significant issues with the aim of finding individual and collective solutions to overcome them.



Source: courtesy to Minsk Dialogue policy forum, October 2020

Executive Summary

Focusing on security in Europe has become even more crucial since a range of new challenges have emerged in the global security landscape. One of these fundamental challenges includes questions of the US’s

commitment to NATO and Europe in general; others involve the UK's departure from the European Union (EU), the increasing role of China and Russia across Eurasia and beyond, and the changing geopolitical landscape in Eurasia through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other newly emerged multilateral institutions. These changes will have profound implications for European security.

Beyond these shifting dynamics, other emerging challenges include instability, and violence in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Europe itself, in addition to cyber and hybrid attacks. However, the questions remain as to the EU's capacity to adapt to and meet these challenges, as well as the future of cooperative orders, as once posited by the EU's Global Security Strategy (2016).¹

Drawing on the knowledge and expertise of our team, affiliated with the GCRF COMPASS project, this policy paper outlines core security challenges as well as opportunities for the EU and the wider Eurasian region. Not only is it concerned with the impact of the bigger players – the EU, Russia and China in particular; it also examines the growing role of *other states* across Central Eurasia spanning from Belarus in the west, and Kazakhstan in the east. It offers the following key recommendations:

- To achieve strategic consonance between Russia and NATO/EU member states it is important to involve not only states but also institutions. These actors should be invited to actively take part in various dialogues, and contribute to developing clear cooperation directions.
- The major actors should consider working towards a new version of the Helsinki Act's 'three baskets.' This new form should include additional baskets that embrace information security and the mixture of hard and soft security threats.
- The states of the Eastern Neighbourhood and Central Eurasia should play a more active role in international cooperation negotiations and agreements. They can act as catalysts for discussions and help to facilitate closer relationship between various connectivity projects initiated by the EU, Russia, and China, as well as their implementation.
- Taking into account the changing nature of the international system, the EU in particular needs to take leadership in developing dialogue with Russia and China, and to produce a more unified comprehensive policy towards the wider Eurasian space.
- Recent changes in Central Asia and its growing role in building peace, stability and regional connectivity with Afghanistan should be taken seriously by both the EU and NATO. They need to seek ways of developing a common framework of cooperation across the Central Eurasian space (to include eastern neighbourhood and Central Asia), and support the Central Asian states beyond its new strategy adopted in June 2019.

¹ European External Action Service (2016) *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A global strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy*. Brussels. http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

Introduction

The eastern region has been at the epicentre of the latest alarming developments in European security. Given its geostrategic significance, this part of Europe historically has always been the victim of any political and military confrontation between the East and the West. Unfortunately, this has not changed over time and even today Eastern Europe remains the area where some major geopolitical contradictions concentrate and then burst into the open.

Yet, the reverse is also true: whatever happens in wider Eurasia, it would immediately impact on broader geopolitical processes globally. As a result, developments in this region are always a key driver of the security pivot across Europe and Eurasia. The lingering conflicts over Crimea and Donbas, once again, serve as sad manifestation of this phenomenon. This is what makes the region so important internationally, and raises the stakes of East European security.

It was with this understanding that the Minsk Dialogue Forum started to offer a unique platform for an inclusive discussion about regional security. The inaugural edition of the forum took place in May 2018 and demonstrated right away the high added value of a security dialogue beyond geopolitical dividing lines. Unlike numerous other fora on international affairs and security in and around Eastern Europe, where like-minded experts and policy-makers discuss topics on which they agree, the Minsk Dialogue Forum advances a different philosophy and mission. Minsk wants to be a place where geopolitical stakeholders can ***talk to each other*** rather than *about each other*.

No doubt, this mission is much easier to state than to deliver. It takes an enormous political, analytical, logistical and emotional effort to even start moving in that direction. No progress is possible if stakeholders on both sides of the geopolitical divide are not ready to look into one another's eyes and face uncomfortable and at times disturbing questions. And in this respect, the Minsk Dialogue Forum, as Eugene Chausovsky of Stratfor puts it, is a good barometer of the state of geopolitical affairs in Europe and Eurasia.

The inaugural Minsk Dialogue Forum in 2018 became a success by the mere fact that it did happen and demonstrate, at least, a degree of interest in its mission among key stakeholders of European security. In October 2019, the second iteration of the Minsk Dialogue Forum took place building on the success of the inaugural forum. The event gathered more than 700 participants from 61 countries. The participant list included high-profile acting and former politicians and diplomats, as well as leading experts representing EU member states, Eastern Partnership countries, USA, Russia, China, and core international organisations in the field (OSCE, NATO, CSTO, and the UN).

Even more telling was the list of the Forum's partners. Besides its main strategic partners – the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the GCRF COMPASS project – the partner list included 15 other organisations from the UK, Germany, USA, Russia, Austria, France, Switzerland, Georgia, Turkey, Belgium, and Belarus. Some of those partner organisations will likely not feature together as part of the same event elsewhere, and the very fact that they did undertake certain partner commitments within the framework of the Minsk Dialogue Forum points to at least some emerging demand for *talking to each other* on difficult geopolitical matters. It is in our common interest to do our best in order to turn this initial interest into sustainable progress to the benefit of security and stability in Europe and Eurasia.

This policy paper presents the key points of discussion and consensus at the Forum's multiple sessions. The paper has been structured in such a way as to reflect key discussions at the 2019 MD forum, and to outline the overall context of European security, core interests and opportunities of its stakeholders (both states, and international organisations), and security implications for the wider region. It ends with a list of specific policy recommendations tailored to the needs and possibilities of key actors.

European Security: Key Challenges

The 2014 Ukraine crisis dramatically altered the European security landscape, creating new realities for the 21st century. Security concerns facing Europe today are broader and more complex than at any time in history. We are now living in a so-called “VUCA”-world – a world of increasing volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.² The changing nature of the balance of power and the appearance of new types of threats, larger in scope and complexity, pose significant challenges to both hard and soft security. Successfully addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach, including both big and small powers as well as European and non-European actors, to facilitate more cooperative regional orders, in order to make complexity more manageable.

Hard security challenges

The world has become increasingly volatile today. The crisis in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea have taken everyone by surprise and demonstrated that national borders can be forcefully changed even in the 21st century. The crisis has significantly intensified one of the most notable challenges to hard security which deals with the strategic dissonance between Russia and the West, i.e. their disagreement over the conceptualisation of Euro-Atlantic security, including on such strategically important issues as NATO and EU eastward enlargement. As a result, not only Ukraine’s security was put at stake, but also the very foundations of the global security system, including the principles of non-use of force and territorial integrity.

Volatility is closely linked to uncertainty which became another significant result of increasing Russia-West tensions. It manifested itself in the recent American withdrawal from the INF Treaty.³ Originally signed in 1987, the Treaty aimed to end the Cold War and its suspension in 2019 reinforced the New Cold War conception of the world, suggesting that the global security architecture is in crisis and the future of European security is unpredictable and ambiguous.

The emergence of terrorist groups (such as ISIS and Al-Qaida), asymmetrical warfare and increasingly easy access to powerful weapons signify the complexity of hard security challenges. The EU and the world at large have become more vulnerable to terrorism, violent extremism and transnational crimes.

The EU is trying to respond to the challenges of the “VUCA” world by strengthening its own military potential and developing a security community by activating the Permanent Structured Cooperation mechanism (PESCO). According to [opinion polls](#), around 80 percent of EU citizens support the formation of a European army which would complement NATO with the EU’s own military mechanism. An additional trigger for this trend is China’s increasing challenge to Western military technological superiority, which signals that China is ready to become a global military power on par with the USA, creating additional ambiguities for European security.

Soft security challenges

The rise of China as a global power also increases uncertainty of economic development in wider Eurasia and raises questions of competition versus cooperation between the EU and other economic blocs and initiatives, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the recently launched BRI.

The EU often views the BRI as a challenge: China is intensifying its engagement with countries in the EU’s neighbourhood but uses different instruments of doing business with its partners compared to those of the EU. This concerns, for example, the violations of workers’ rights, safety regulations and transparency/

² Gnad, O. and Burrows, M (2017) “Between ‘Muddling Through’ and ‘Grand Design’: Regaining Political Initiative – The Role of Strategic Foresight”, *Futures*, 97 DOI: 10.1016/j.futures.2017.06.002

³ For more info: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Intermediate-Range-Nuclear-Forces-Treaty>

accountability of bilateral deals. In addition, China binds the target states with loans, thereby increasing their dependence and vulnerability to China's influence. To make relations with China less ambiguous, the EU should expand its relations to facilitate more comprehensive, sustainable and rules-based engagement, applying its recently created instruments, such as the EU-China connectivity platform⁴ and the post of the EU connectivity ambassador to successfully implement its 2018 Connectivity Strategy.⁵

The complexity of the soft security challenges is intensified by the problems of energy security and environmental sustainability. Addressing this challenge is particularly important for European countries, as the majority of them rely on energy imports to satisfy their domestic demand. Limitations of natural resources, exposure to natural hazards and high environmental risks have increasingly started to dominate national and international agendas, increasing the uncertainty and ambiguity of secure human development. Addressing these challenges requires undertaking comprehensive reforms which should focus on decarbonising economies, increasing the share of renewable energy in the total primary energy supply as well as developing diversification strategies, i.e. acquiring energy from alternative sources. This can help reduce Europe's vulnerability to energy imports and make the EU's energy policy more resilient to potential external shocks.

Furthermore, new challenges to soft security have emerged due to the nature of internet connectivity which is reshaping the global information space and augmenting ambiguity. Social media are increasingly seen as a weapon of mass manipulation and the use of fake news has become commonplace. Increasing digitalisation also poses a growing risk to electronic data management including instances of theft, damage of computers' hardware or software and the disruption of the services they provide. In this respect the role of cyber security, i.e. the protection of computer systems from cyberattacks, becomes highly critical.

Thus, challenges to European security are multi-faceted and complex. Successfully addressing these challenges will require the coordinated work of various stakeholders, ranging from government ministries, local and international donors as well as NGOs and the general public, who will need to recalibrate their policy approaches both at the macro and micro levels.

The role of the states-in-between in addressing European security challenges

The six states of the eastern neighbourhood - Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan - can play a more vital role in addressing both hard and soft security challenges posed by the VUCA-world for Europe and Eurasia at large. They can serve as a link between Brussels and Moscow and act as security stabilisers in the region.

First, they can play a key role in developing complementarity and cooperation between different regional integration projects, such as the EU, the EAEU and the BRI. For instance, Armenia is a member of the EAEU, but it has also signed an Enhanced and Comprehensive Partnership Agreement with the EU (CEPA); whereas Belarus participates in the EAEU but also plays an active role in realising BRI projects. These examples of cooperation should be multiplied and strengthened in order to establish and increase closer synergies between all three integration projects and decrease vulnerability of smaller states to China's influence.

In addition, Belarus has undertaken vigorous diplomacy and peace efforts to reduce the risks of regional confrontation and decrease strategic dissonance between Russia and the West. Minsk has become a

⁴ European Commission, Mobility and Transport. *The EU-China Connectivity Platform*, https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/international/eu-china-connectivity-platform_en

⁵ European Commission (2018), *Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy*, Brussels, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_connecting_europe_and_asia_-_building_blocks_for_an_eu_strategy_2018-09-19.pdf

platform for international talks to resolve the crisis in Ukraine as well as proposed other de-escalation initiatives in the region, such as the “Helsinki-2” process, which focuses on establishing a broad dialogue to improve relations between the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian countries. Potentially, Belarus could act not only as a platform for solving conflicts, but also participate in direct mediation as well as provide advisory support to mediators, following the example of Switzerland.

Finally, the states of eastern neighbourhood can become sources of socio-economic stability in the region. They have a cohort of highly skilled workers, including mathematicians, scientists, technicians and engineers. With proper investments, the adoption of measures to stimulate job creation and reduce brain-drain, these states can become regional IT and technological hubs, developing solutions for the various soft security challenges.

To conclude, the EU and its (eastern) neighbourhood face several new and complex security threats, which are becoming more varied and transnational in nature. These challenges require an effective and coordinated response ensuring that adopted solutions will be sustainable. A leading role in this process should be assigned to the local actors (states and communities) as providers of regional security and capacity-building. They can act as interlocutors between the bigger powers, as well as drivers of change and regional order-making to make complexity of the VUCA-world a more manageable task.



The UK, EU and Russian Ambassadors at the MD Future Leaders Session – Their Excellences Dirk Schuebel, Jaqueline Perkins, and Dmitry Mezentsev, Belarus, 7 October 2019. Courtesy to MD policy forum

The Major Actors: Perspectives, Challenges and Opportunities

NATO

Many in the West presume that NATO is the primary multilateral institution responsible for Europe’s security today. According to this view, NATO’s enlargement into Central and Eastern Europe brought stability and well-being. In addition, NATO has cooperated with non-members in Europe through its Partnership for Peace initiative, supporting reforms in these partner states and building confidence and trust.

Those outside the organisation often have a different view. For them, NATO's cooperation with non-members blurs the external boundaries of, and reduces trust towards, the alliance. After the end of the Cold War NATO sought to adapt itself with out-of-area operations and, in the wake of 9/11, to expand its scope and deal with non-traditional threats and threats from non-state actors. This has led to ambiguities about NATO's place and role in European security. In any case, many persist in thinking that NATO is best geared for dealing with traditional, militarised state threats.

One downside of efforts to engage and cooperate with non-members has been to alienate Russia which chose not to be involved in the Partnership for Peace programme. The NATO-Russia Founding Act, signed in 1997, always looked like a missed opportunity. The NATO-Russia Council, formed in 2002, was always too ill-defined: it didn't grant Russia the access or influence it sought in respect of NATO's activities, yet NATO – emphasising the uniqueness of the arrangement – never appeared prepared to go further. Nonetheless, its suspension after 2014 was a kneejerk reaction to the annexation of Crimea that had symbolic value but did not give Russia any compelling reason to alter its actions and worsened relations. The resumption of NATO-Russia dialogue should be welcomed. NATO members and Russia share interests in countering terrorism, arms control and the de-escalation of current tensions.

Russia

The largest and most militarised country in Europe, Russia feels that it has been excluded from the European security architecture since the Cold War. Russian officials argue that they have made innovative proposals for revisions to the security apparatus that Western states have ignored. In their view the wilful exclusion of Russia bears the brunt of the blame for, *inter alia*, the Ukraine crisis because Western actors refuse to understand and acknowledge Russia's interests. Russia's appetite for participation in Western-dominated institutions has appreciably declined.

Russia refuses to describe the Ukraine conflict as an interstate (rather than civil) conflict and has strived to uncouple the resolution of the Donbas question from Crimea. In the last aim it has largely succeeded even if NATO officials do not publicly admit as much. Its narrative concerning the breakdown of the European security order, as well as its perceptions of responsibility, differ from those of NATO member states. These divergent histories supply a major obstacle to forging any sort of consensus. Western states subjected Russia to sanctions – yet Russia has become more active in its foreign policy and not changed its course.

Still, Russia has a keen interest in preserving many facets of the current system of global governance, not least the UN Security Council, which reveals a certain amount of common ground. The ongoing crisis in European security shows how little agreement there is about the rules of the game on a regional level. It's clichéd but true to say that if Europe can find ways to include Russia and benefit from its experience, then a sustainable new security architecture could emerge. Greater cooperation and emphasis on those areas where there is agreement, for example about the increasing ambiguity and complexity of non-traditional and non-state security threats, must be used to nurture the belief that consensus can be found in other areas.

The European Union (EU)

The EU prides itself on a self-proclaimed values-based foreign and security policy. It believes in its own normative and transformative power. However, the current security environment reminds us that it can be the subject of transformations as well. Some argue that the EU has been shifting away from its supranational aspects towards greater reliance on its intergovernmental qualities as its external environment has become less stable. Others maintain that, in the current security landscape, initiatives such as the EU's PESCO constitute promising new instruments that will bolster the EU's security role.

It is therefore debatable as to whether the EU *in toto* should be considered a major player in security terms, or whether it is merely the sum of variously significant member states. This partly reflects unwillingness of member states to cede sovereignty on issues of high politics. In part it reflects the divergent threat perceptions of members, with those in the south visibly more concerned about migration where Russia predominates threat perceptions in the north and east. In small part it reflects the fact that the EU is hostage to political cycles.

If there is a trend towards greater intergovernmentalism, then this only raises the threshold for forging a coherent, consensual policy in security matters. This might suggest that the EU is side-lining itself from 'hard' security issues, but its considerable financial and diplomatic resources should not be overlooked, nor should the ramifications of its potential to supply public goods across the continent.

Further institutional perspectives

Analysts and politicians recognise the contribution the 1970s Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) made to easing Cold War-era confrontation. Some see the need for a new 'Helsinki spirit.' The model that emerged from Helsinki talks in the 1970s underscored a linkage between human rights and security, which is carried on today by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Council of Europe makes this linkage as well and, aside for a brief hiatus after 2014, Russia's renewed participation in that institution can be a plus.

The OSCE and Council of Europe are well-placed to foster the role of civil societies and local non-state actors in security affairs. In a related vein, a wider issue concerns the struggle that journalists and their audiences contend with in an era of information saturation, which has challenged the methods of the former and the analytical capacities of the latter. The information environment and information security are key issues feeding into threat perceptions of all parties. The question of regulation, though, provokes fierce debate given the varying degree of democracy across the continent. One novel suggestion is to revisit the Helsinki Final Act's 'three baskets' and introduce additional baskets reflecting changes in technology and the information space.

The link between human rights and security is less central to both the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the EAEU. It is a moot point whether these Russia-dominated institutions should be considered to have a role in Europe's security. The CSTO, as a military alliance separate from NATO, emphasises that it has sought cooperation with NATO and clearly the two blocs face a range of common threats. Russia's partners in the Eurasian Economic Union have resisted the politicisation of that arrangement and there remains moderate support across Europe for a single economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

Other European states and external actors

The empowerment of local actors has emerged as a common thread in recent security debates. Powerful states and institutions often neglect both non-state and civil society actors, as well as smaller European states that do not belong to NATO or the EU. The latter have the potential to act as more significant players in European security.

NATO officials claim that small states routinely serve as the bridge-builders within NATO and often positively challenge the expectations or assumptions of weightier actors. Belarus and Georgia maintain good relations despite their divergent beliefs about Russia and their ability to cooperate can be learned from. Armenia and Kazakhstan both have agreements with the EU alongside their membership of the Eurasian Economic Union, and such arrangements could act as stepping-stones to broader cooperation across the region.

A key challenge to overcome for these states is the perception of their status of 'in-between-ness', and that they are confronted with a binary choice of having to align with, or be dominated by, one side. Bringing

these local actors directly into the dialogue about security offers a prospective way to reduce the zero-sum logic that underpins too much of the discussion. They should not feel like ‘hostages’ of their geopolitical situation, and take full advantage of a changing international environment, where ‘the size’ plays a lesser role in international relations these days.

NATO has kept the United States actively involved in Europe’s security since 1949, although questions have been raised about the extent of US commitments in the Trump era. Its position outside of the economic integration blocs, either the EU or the EAEU, arguably incline it to view these projects from a geopolitical perspective. Ultimately many consider that US resources are necessary for European security: others, especially in Russia, view any increase in US presence in Europe as a threat.

In the 21st century China cannot be ignored as a major actor in global security. Already many European states have accrued debts to China and, given China’s willingness to invest and loan, those debts can be expected to grow in time. There is clearly some compatibility, even complementarity, between the professed goals of China’s BRI and those of the EU and EAEU. Indeed, cooperation between the BRI and EAEU could alleviate the perceived problem of Russia’s preponderance in the latter of the two. There would be great suspicion, however, if China tried to involve itself in Europe’s security more generally.

In any case, the rise of China renders it impossible to address Europe’s security from the perspective of the past. In a constantly changing world any policies adopted today need to have an eye focused on the Europe of the future.



Lord Teverson, member of the House of Lords, UK and COMPASS Advisory Board member, at Plenary Two “EU-EAEU-BRI: Any real areas of mutual interest?” Courtesy of MD policy forum, October 2019

European Security in the Wider Neighbourhood

Europe presently faces two main strategic challenges in its wider neighbourhood that stem from current developments in great power relations. First, Russia and China are advancing connectivity and integration projects whose norms and standards threaten to challenge those of the European Union. The EAEU has failed to complete the implementation of the rules governing its single market, while the scope of Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership and China's BRI remains unclear.

Their varied attempts to connect European and Asian markets affect several regions of the wider European space – Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. While the EU market remains most attractive in the first two of these regions on which the Eastern Partnership is centred, Russia and China persist as the dominant external actors in the third even if Brussels is gradually increasing its presence there. One therefore faces the prospect of a polycentric “mishmash” emerging across Eurasia that could challenge the EU's preference for uniform integration. Although a rules-based international order mirroring its internal political system has traditionally been the sine qua non of EU foreign policy, member states may now be forced to reckon with a much more complex and multifaceted global environment.

Second, Russia's “pivot to the east” and its deepening strategic partnership with China have effectively caused Eurasian political dynamics to penetrate the European space, by virtue of the fact that Russia and many of its core interests lie in Europe. As such, the EU can no longer content itself with developing separate sets of principles with which to engage each of Russia and China. Rather, it needs a more comprehensive Eurasian strategy that tackles both powers simultaneously, which in turn requires it to think more strategically if not geopolitically.

Referencing geopolitics is certain to raise red flags in an organisation that has long praised the virtues of multilateralism. Disagreements between Paris and Berlin on what international posture the EU should adopt have now come to the fore, acting as a catalyst for discussion but casting doubt on its ability to develop a coherent strategic culture.

And yet while it thus may seem appealing to focus on resolving internal quarrels before generating a greater global footprint, concrete action cannot afford to wait. A sustained standoff between Russia and the West will likely increase the strategic character of the Sino-Russian economic relationship, building on the deeper military, security and diplomatic ties that Russia and China have already forged. Whether the outcome is a Sinocentric Eurasian order or an increasingly illiberal Russia, European norms stand to lose relative clout across the wider Eurasian space.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and geopolitical considerations

The SCO was created as a military and counterterrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing forum. This was significant for all parties within the bloc, especially for the Central Asian states which were concerned by the so-called “three evils”: terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. It has gradually expanded its cooperation in political, economic, military and cultural spheres, developing its institutional structure, creating its main permanent operational bodies like the Secretariat (Beijing), a Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS, Tashkent), a Regional Economic Council and a regular forum for Ministerial and other high-level meetings.

This bloc has further expanded due to the worsening state of relations between Russia and the US, especially since 2014, and Western sanctions on Russia. Belarus has been provided an observer status and Azerbaijan and Armenia, dialogue partners, have applied to gain this observer status within the organization. In the context of broader geopolitics, it is important to understand the dynamics of Russia's re-orientated foreign policy towards Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The question is whether Moscow would be able to transform

the EAEU into a political bloc and force others (the Central Asian states, Armenia and Belarus) to comply with its demands. In the context of the recent changes, Russia would aim to get closer to China and form a stronger “alliance” and try to reduce the US’s role in the region. The June 2019 meeting between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, during which both parties discussed the possibilities of integrating the BRI with the EAEU, shows this further alignment potentials. Having said that, Russia would be cautious in its approach to dealing with China. China is the world’s second economic power. In economic terms, Russia could only play second fiddle to China and find itself in a weaker position in dealing with broader financial and security spending areas. The inclusion of India into the SCO cooperation platform, as a balancing power, demonstrates Russia’s desire to hedge against China.

The EU’s new strategy towards Central Asia

Since the 1990s, the EU has generated five different strategies for Central Asia. Until recently, it failed to come up with a clear cooperation vision for this region. The EU’s previous strategies for Central Asia focused heavily on energy security, as the region offered new energy import opportunities for Europe. The new strategy adopted in June 2019, unlike previously, places more emphasis on partnership, and resilience-building, and is more flexible in tackling complex issues such as human and labour rights. The new strategy is better equipped to assume cooperation along its three main headings: “resilience”, “prosperity” and “working better together”. The strategy aims to avoid competition with Russia, China and the ‘New Great Game logic’, instead emphasizing the benefits of cooperation and non-exclusive partnerships. It addresses the needs of Central Asian states related to countering common security challenges, such as climate change and environmental degradation, terrorism and violent extremism, cybersecurity, non-proliferation and others. Practice will show if these concrete priorities would prove conducive to the stabilization of the region and beyond.



The COMPASS consortium at the forum – Professor Kholahmad Samiev (TNU) and Nilufar Rakhmatullaeva (UWED). Courtesy of MD policy forum, October 2019

Recommendations:

1. The 'strategic dissonance' between Russia and NATO/EU member states has become intractable. The tendency to talk in hidebound camps, encouraged by policies of excluding Russia from fora, has only perpetuated that dissonance and exacerbated security disagreements. At present, most proposals aimed at easing tensions originate one-sidedly without much effort to cross the divide. This has not worked, and the following measures should be considered:
 - Strategic consonance will only be found if all major actors participate in joint discussions and coordinated policies, with efforts made to emphasise areas of agreement – which will reinforce the belief that consensus can be found. To this end all actors (states and institutions) should be invited to develop proposals by involving actors from across the divide.
 - Other states, who are primarily seen as 'takers' rather than 'makers' of strategic discourse, should have more stake in the process, serving, e.g. as chairs or mediators of these discussions. They can act as bridges between Brussels and Moscow as well as become security providers for Europe and Eurasia writ large. They could also be provided with additional resources to allow them to lead on monitoring and confidence-building initiatives.
2. A changed informational and technological environment has rendered Europe's security architecture less effective. That architecture partly evolved from the provisions of 1975's Helsinki Final Act, which facilitated the path out of the Cold War.
 - The major actors should consider working towards a new version of the Helsinki Act's 'three baskets.' They should consider including additional baskets that embrace information security and the mixture of hard and soft security threats identified in this document and which constitute today's VUCA world.
 - Other states should use their potential to become regional technological and IT hubs. In this capacity they can develop solutions to various soft security problems, *inter alia*, the problem of information security.
 - All states have sensitivities about sovereignty and the core norms of sovereignty should be safeguarded, but all states must also recognise that coordinated security policies necessarily involve some relinquishing of control. States need to recognise that relinquishing control to third parties does not undermine sovereignty since they are not transferring any ultimate authority.
3. The EU has struggled to generate a unifying policy towards Russia and China. Taking into account the changing nature of the international system, with the emergence of new regional and global connectively platforms initiated by these powers the EU needs to find a more comprehensive policy framework towards wider Eurasian space.
 - France and Germany should harmonize their foreign policies towards China and make regular joint visits to the country accompanied by high-ranking EU officials. Brussels should also re-gear its Asia connectivity strategy toward enhancing the cohesion and stability of the wider European space, in order to build de facto bridges between the EU and the EAEU in the absence of productive dialogue between Russia and Western capitals.
 - The EU's new approach could also include working in partnership with the SCO. The inclusion of India and Pakistan could offer a new impetus for the EU and NATO to engage with this bloc. Consequently, a suitable new security architecture could emerge.
 - Recent changes in Central Asia have raised its international clout and role in building peace, stability and regional connectivity, which should necessitate a wider dialogue between the region and international stakeholders, including the EU, China and Russia.

Facilitating Cooperation in a World of Uncertainty

Future Leaders' DECLARATION

on Security, Order and Interdependence in Wider Europe and Central Eurasia

Minsk Dialogue Policy Forum

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By Zachary Paikin (University of Kent), Callie Berman (University of Cambridge), Dzmitry Bialko (Belarusian State University), Bogdan Iodchik (Belarusian State University), Temur Islamov (University of World Economy and Diplomacy), Alisiya Ivanova (Belarusian State University), Aliaksandra Kondral (Belarusian State University), Alla Leukavets (Belarusian State University), Shafag Mehraliyeva (ADA University), Tanya Radchuk (University of Kent), Anvari Safari (Tajik National University), Samad Samadli (ADA University), Tina Schivatcheva (University of Cambridge), and Farzonai Shamsiddin (Tajik National University)



DECLARATION

Relations between the European Union, Russia and China are currently defined by a mixture of uncertainty and opportunity. Shifting balances of power between these three actors, and the presence of rival norms and visions of international order between some of them threaten to undermine the long-term stability of the Central Eurasian region, and the wider European and global spaces. **Yet there remain both ample scope and a significant need to foster a cooperative international environment.** If handled with care, the interaction between China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the EU's Asia Connectivity Strategy and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has

the potential to set positive-sum rules of the game across Central Eurasia. Russia and China are already deepening their strategic partnership rooted nominally in mutual respect for each other's integration projects, potentially driving the establishment of a new kind of great power relations. Similar strategic developments take shape between the EU and Central Asia, the EU and China vis-à-vis the region. Furthermore, French President Emmanuel Macron's vision of an EU-Russia reset have the potential to clarify and delineate many of the contours of the renewed relationship between the EU and Russia, in the wider European space (including Syria and Iran) in a way that strengthens regional security and may even make an idealistic prospect of economic integration from Lisbon to Vladivostok a reality one day.

Key to the development of cooperative orders is the region itself inclusive of Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. While most countries of the region are practicing multi-vectored foreign policies of some sort, four in particular stand out: **Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. This declaration contends that these four states should take steps to enhance their international agency, clout and cooperation in a way that allows them not only to benefit from deepening ties with multiple leading actors, but also to turn them into term-setters and pillars of international order.** Rather than thinking of themselves as pivot states that are the object of great power competition, these should become important **hubs** that can stabilize the interaction between the major players in the region as Eurasian integration proceeds apace. Crucially, such a strategy respects the core principles of all major players: the EU's emphasising states' right to choose their orientation, Russia's highlighting the sacrosanct nature of state sovereignty and equal cooperation, and China's valuing non-interference in states' internal affairs.

We recognize that the international conditions for negotiating a new wider Euro-Asian security order are currently not present. We do not expect anyone across the Eurasian supercontinent to compromise on their legitimately held principles, norms and positions regarding how they believe international relations should be organized. Furthermore, we are not advocating neutrality for the individual states either: Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan will have their own international strategy and own particular equilibrium for relations with the EU, Russia and China. **The goal of this strategy is to allow these countries to assume more responsibility for ensuring the stability of their respective regions, strengthen the degree of cooperation between them as well as strengthening their own internal governance, and gradually ease the move of great power relations from conflict management toward cooperation.** With time, the aim is that they should serve as examples for other countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia to emulate and share their best-practice experience. The conflict in Ukraine is a stark reminder that everyone matters, and that states caught in-between have a responsibility to respond and contribute toward enhancing international stability.

What follows is a non-exhaustive list of potential initiatives that Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan could jointly undertake to achieve the ends outlined above. The EU, Russia and China should encourage and support these projects wherever possible. Indeed, it is in the interest of all, for the political, security, and socio-economic costs associated with building a more cooperative international and regional orders to be distributed equality and in partnership, so long as the core interests and norms are respected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing international security and dialogue:

- Further establish the position of Minsk, Baku, Tashkent and Dushanbe as *places for international dialogue* along various tracks, each with a specific regional focus, along the lines of the Minsk Dialogue;
- *Establish a quadrilateral* dialogue on sharing best practices regarding the development of multi-vectored foreign policies;
- *Reaffirm the territorial integrity of states* as a key organizing principle for future interstate interaction;
- Play an active role in *stabilizing regional conflicts* in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central-Southcentral Asia and develop coordinated strategies for conflict resolution which would take into consideration specificity of each of the conflicts;

- Establish a joint platform for the discussion of how to *prevent further militarization* in key theatres in the wider European and central Eurasian regions without undermining the importance of national military capabilities and collective security systems;
- Initiate a joint Eurasia-wide dialogue on *conflict prevention and share best practices* including, but not limited to strengthening institutions and reducing militarization;
- Work to combat *human and illegal arms trafficking* to preclude actors in areas of conflict to replenish their supply with weapons and ammunition and provide particular protection to refugees and migrants, who are the most at-risk for human trafficking;
- *Facilitate and pursue decarbonization strategies* and transitions to a green economy to reduce the risk of great power conflict, as well as furthering the implementation of climate-conscious policies and reducing the probability of any transboundary environmental hazards;
- Collaborate to *strengthen food security* and other key drivers of long-term domestic stability, governance and resilience;
- Strengthen joint efforts to *combat terrorism and radicalization* and enhance intelligence-sharing to ensure cooperation on every stage of combating radical movements - from their detection to taking the timely measures.

Economic collaboration and interdependence:

- Outline a joint vision to *strengthen economic links* among small and medium powers across Eurasia in a way that respects the integrity of all major economic and regulatory blocs, as a means of allowing them to assume greater responsibility and capacity for managing international order. This could also help to establish bridges and/or buffers where necessary between the EU, the EAEU and China;
- Jointly propose a *set of norms and standards* on key issues to govern convergence and connectivity in Eurasia, with reference where relevant to established processes (including but not limited to the Eastern Partnership). This could simultaneously allow for elements of divergence between ordering practices in different regions where necessary to ensure stability in great power relations;
- *Harmonize production standards* for key goods being exported to the European Single Market;
- Provide legislative support for *removing barriers to greenfield and other investments* that can drive innovation and economic diversification. *Increase collaboration with institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank* to enhance economic development and growth;
- Advocate for the *harmonizing of digital markets* across Eurasia which will help the existing companies to grow faster and increase employment in the target states.

Institutional development:

- *Cooperate to strengthen the rule of law* and reform public services to increase market attractiveness;
- Implement *judiciary and anti-corruption* reforms and introduce *e-governance mechanisms* to ensure more transparency in the decision-making processes;
- Strengthen institutional cooperation with European counterparts, including through the existing inter-parliamentary Euronest programme;
- *Increase media literacy* as a means of strengthening the foundations of international cooperation at the grassroots level;
- *Collaborate on education policy* to strengthen future generations of government and policy leaders. This can be done, inter alia, by integrating into European scientific collaboration networks and strengthening people-to-people contacts through deepening university exchanges and research stays abroad;
- Implement measures against brain drain, including simplification of red tape and creation of a competitive environment in new industries like the start-up sector;
- Invest in development of national IT industries and creation of regional IT hubs which can become the driver of economic progress.

With the return of great power rivalry over the course of the past several years, the asymmetric nature of international relations has been put on display. Carefully calibrated and coordinated strategies by leading

regional states to enhance supercontinent-wide interdependence can help to bring about greater symmetry and stability in Eurasia -- both among leading powers and between those powers and smaller states -- not necessarily in terms of the overall balance of power but rather in terms of the distribution of responsibilities and the smoothness of integration. Indeed, as they are not constrained to the same extent by normative rivalry and disputes over the rules of the game, now is an opportune time for the local stakeholders to gradually clear the way for Eurasian integration to move forward in a smooth fashion, growing the toolbox of policy options available to the EU, Russia and China in the process. Such an undertaking would strengthen their sovereignty and capabilities (as well as those of other small states), thus strengthening the core pillars and principles of the contemporary international order in a way that would be welcomed by Brussels, Moscow and Beijing alike. Just as Oman and Singapore have played a key role in keeping international sea lanes open and preserving decades of American naval pre-eminence, so, too, can Belarus, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan ease the path toward the return of the Eurasian landmass to the centre of global affairs.

The above-signed
Future leaders
GCRF UKRI COMPASS project

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