



## Transatlantic Unity

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# RUSSIA'S CHALLENGES TO THE TRANSATLANTIC UNITY

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*Recent steps by the Kremlin not only undermine regional security in Europe, but they also put transatlantic unity under the test. Partly this is a result of the overall degrading of international institutions in times of crisis, but also it is an effect of Russia's deliberate efforts to dismantle key transatlantic institutions. Moscow's revisionist policy is challenging foundations of the world order, in which long-term partnership between the US and Europe has always been a key element. Whether American and European strategic interests will still be overlapping is a focus of this article.*


## Introduction

Transatlantic unity that has been hardened by the Cold War and the fight against terrorism is going through hard times. Based on common values including democracy, individual freedom, human rights, and rule of law, the Euro-Atlantic community is under growing pressure from the Russian Federation. Russia's reluctance to follow the generally accepted rules and norms of behaviour in the modern world follows from its intention to return to a model of the world order dominated by the right of force, where a stronger state can interfere in internal affairs of a weaker one, where economic incentives are replaced by threats and blackmail. Russia, with its nuclear potential and energy capabilities, has become a significant threat to democratic values. International mechanisms established to maintain peace and stability did not prove to be ready for such a development.

Leading security institutions, especially the UN and the OSCE, have demonstrated

their inability to counter the military aggression, their reaction coming to nothing more than showing concerns, anxiety, and appeals to stop aggression. Events around Ukraine also revealed the

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lack of effectiveness of the European Union and NATO's policy. The policy of Russia's "engagement" or appeasement, which was based on the general attitude of treating it as a predictable and reliable partner, failed. Evidence suggests the growing threat of a large-scale armed clash, especially in Europe.

## Reunification or War

In 1992, there was a conversation between the first Ukrainian ambassador in Moscow Volodymyr Kryzhanivsky and the Russian deputy Sergey Baburin. When the ambassador asked how Russia saw the prospects of the two countries' relationship, the deputy replied, "Reunification or war." When Kryzhanivsky asked, "Don't you anticipate that we can cooperate as good neighbours?", Baburin answered, "I have explained to you clearly: reunification or war".<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, Russia withdrew from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which removed control over the movements of its armed forces and lifted all flanking restrictions. This created conditions for holding Russian full-scale military exercises in the Caucasus, regrouping large forces, and the invasion to Georgia in 2008. A similar scenario was implemented in Ukraine in 2014. Using the absence of accountability under the said treaty, Russia is now taking steps to accommodate powerful military groups and carriers of nuclear weapons in Crimea. By increasing its own military potential, Russia stimulates a new arms race and thus increases the risk of an armed conflict in Europe. Another worrying fact is that Russia's military doctrine involves the use of nuclear weapons even in an ordinary course of an armed conflict or when there arises a threat to its citizens' interests on the territory of other countries.<sup>2</sup> The threat of nuclear blackmail is becoming higher in view of the statements of Russian politicians and journalists within Russia's confrontation with the West. Russia argues that new threats at the perimeter of its southern borders require modernisation of its nuclear arsenal.

Russia is positioning itself as a global power that seeks to change the world order at its discretion. Military tension at the borders of Russia with neighbouring countries is not reduced, because the Kremlin supports it consciously. Challenges from Russia are increasing. Russia wants to participate in decision making concerning all important global issues. They believe that they are entitled to the right to influence the post-Soviet countries, and these countries have limited sovereignty. Russia also believes that it is a civilised alternative to the West. In our opinion, Russia's main tools of influence are nuclear weapons and modernised army<sup>3</sup>. A policy of deterrence and the North Atlantic Alliance's protection guarantee would be a response to such provocations.

The Russian Federation sets the tasks to undermine the European and transatlantic unity, dilute the values on which the Western society is based. And so far Russia has received no adequate response from the West. By escalating violence in the east of Ukraine, Russia continually tests the strength of the transatlantic unity, quite successfully so far. Only Russia has benefited from any "Normandy format" meetings. Therefore, Western leaders can really express nothing but "deep concern".

Russian propaganda is extremely widespread and convincing. Russia aims not so much to distort the image of Ukraine specifically, but to use war – informational and actual fighting in Donbas – as a means of splitting the Euro-Atlantic space. It looks like Russia has long pretended to be a responsible partner to deal with and a systemic political player, without in fact being it. Russia has an extensive experience in subversive activities. The Soviet Union conducted massive propaganda in

<sup>1</sup> День. – 2015. 23 червня.

<sup>2</sup> Военная доктрина Российской Федерации от 25 декабря 2014 г., [<https://rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html>].

<sup>3</sup> Ядерное оружие и безопасность России в 21 веке, [<http://www.geopolitica.ru>].

Western countries, in particular, by influencing left-wing and right-wing political movements in Europe. It would be simplistic to explain everything by corruption, though sometimes the corruption component is also obvious. Russian propaganda in the West effectively influences the European society. Russia skilfully uses different information means, playing on differences in Europe and on the differences between the US and Europe. Russia is trying to divide the transatlantic alliance, supporting the parties with Eurosceptic and anti-American rhetoric. All our activities are aimed to counter Russian propaganda and should be aimed to combat it.

An important factor of the Russian influence is the fact that it remains one of the largest suppliers of hydrocarbon energy to the EU, which is still largely dependent, in this respect, on Russian supplies. The Old World's energy dependence on Russian energy has become a factor that contributes to many European governments' loyalty to Moscow and its policy. In some capitals, especially in Budapest, Vienna, and Rome, they fear the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian gas wars and want to safeguard themselves by setting a regime of "special relationship" with Russia. Many European producers urged politicians to restore good relations with Russia and abolish restrictive measures.

The EU tends to greatly exaggerate their losses from the sanctions imposed on Russia and "food" embargo in response. Amounts of money in the billions are mentioned, which are not proven by facts and often include not only lost profits but also the indicators of reduced Russian exports to a particular country, scoring them as their own losses. Without really figuring out what actually the EU banned to sell in Russia, the European manufacturers moan about the falling sales of cars and footwear, building materials and

furs, clothing and perfume, and even jewellery in Russia. However, the EU sectoral sanctions against Russia cover only the products and technologies for military and dual-use, as well as high-tech equipment for oil extraction in the Arctic, in the deep shelf, and for shale oil extraction. The EU also tightened restrictions on lending and investment services of a number of Russian banks and companies (defence concerns primarily).

## Russia's Attempts to Divide Europe

Aiming to create the "right" mood in the European society, the Russians exploit the Europeans' disposition to pacifism, using conservatism and anti-Americanism, call for common "spiritual braces" and the traditional "family values", use Slavophil and Russophile sentiments, and manipulate on the fears of new EU enlargement and "neo-Nazis" in Kyiv. Using elements of soft power via its embassies and missions of Rossotrudnychestvo, the Kremlin is trying to change public opinion in the EU countries. Financial opportunities of Gazprom, Russian Railways, Rosneft, Lukoil, and other representatives of big Russian business let the Russians in Europe to promote the "Russian world" and spread myths about the "American-sponsored coup in Kyiv". The struggle for the minds and hearts of the Europeans is also led by propagandists of the TV broadcaster Russia Today, who not only visualise the loss of European business resulting from mutual sanctions, but also relentlessly revile Ukraine<sup>4</sup>.

Referendums in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the elections in the United States, Austria, Bulgaria, and France were held under pressure from the Kremlin, extremely interested in changing the moods in Europe. An American historian Timothy Snyder believes that the attack on Ukraine

<sup>4</sup> Т. Силіна, В. Кравченко, Викрадення Європи, [https://gazeta.dt.ua/international/vikradennya-yevropi-1-\_.html].

is part of Moscow's massive plan to divide Europe. If the EU collapses into many countries, Russia will look stronger on their background.<sup>5</sup>

The escalation of the conflict in Donbas is the Kremlin's attempt to assert itself as a key player in the international arena once again, especially given the changes in the geopolitical situation. At this stage, such attempts do not bring the Russian Federation the expected results, the sanctions remain in force, the international community, in majority, continues to support Ukraine. However, according to M. Demjanenko, the fact that Ukraine has become a hostage in the game of the 'heavyweights' in world politics calls for a response and strengthening the position of Ukraine as an independent and influential entity in the international arena. The favourable attitude of the newly elected US President D. Trump could significantly contribute to this.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, it is indicative that the US Secretary of State R. Tillerson voiced a controversial idea that the United States cannot achieve the objectives of the national security policy if the acceptance of the American values is put forward as a condition. However, he added that Americans in no way will abandon their core values (i.e., it does not mean that "we are not committed to freedom, human dignity, and proper treatment of people worldwide"). Therefore, the US should and will require other countries to take "specific actions concerning the behaviour of their people" if they want to cooperate with the United States. Meanwhile, the US will act "in

support of their values, without using them as a lever".<sup>7</sup> Formally, the US and the EU will follow the principles of borders' inviolability and the world order. But it is the United States as a global leader and responsible nuclear superpower influencing the formation of the world politics that should play a more active role.

To add to this, the EU has not had its own security policy so far, which is actively used by terrorists. There is no single transatlantic community's vision, as some people would like to return to the policy "as usual" with the Russian Federation, and to turn away from Ukraine.

NATO officials insist on the need to act carefully and cautiously "to avoid conflict with Russia". It may seem that Putin managed to intimidate the Alliance, and they see no other way than to negotiate with the aggressor or act according to his script. The West has to understand that Putin's Russia is not a partner, but a real threat to the world order. In the NATO Warsaw Declaration on the transatlantic unity, adopted and unanimously supported by all 28 allies in July 2016, it was stated the countries faced an unprecedented number of security challenges, including Russia's operations, especially in Ukraine, intended to undermine the rules-based order in Europe. Combining their strong transatlantic ties, commitment to democracy, individual freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law, the Alliance will continue to strive for peace, security, and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area, in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter. However, at the same time, there was

<sup>5</sup> Снайдер: "Напад на Україну - це частина масштабного плану Москви щодо поділу Європи", [https://www.unian.ua/politics/994036-snyder-napad-na-ukrajinu-tse-chastina-masshtabnogo-planu-moskvi-schodo-podilu-evropi.html].

<sup>6</sup> Дем'яненко М. Ескалація конфлікту на Донбасі: причини, прогнози, реакція світу, Social Communications Research Center, [http://nbuviap.gov.ua/images/rezonans/2017/rez9.pdf].

<sup>7</sup> Tillerson calls for balancing US security interests, values, "AP News", [https://www.apnews.com/7aff2131d7b4b-10b2c84b89c721b6c9?utm\_campaign=SocialFlow&utm\_source=Twitter&utm\_medium=AP\_Politics].

discussed the readiness for a constructive dialogue with Russia to clearly explain their position and, above all, to minimise the risks of military incidents, including through appropriate measures of transparency. Such provisions of the declaration showed the lack of adequate perception of modern Russia. However, the document stated an optimistic belief in the whole, free, and peaceful Europe. NATO will provide even greater assistance to Ukraine and Georgia, and will continue to assist Moldova.<sup>8</sup>

### Transatlantic Strategic Partnership

It is extremely important to recognise the need to deepen the strategic partnership between NATO and the European Union, particularly in the fight against hybrid threats, through operations in the Mediterranean, by helping partner countries to ensure their own security. Among the new threats to the world, President of the European Council Donald Tusk mentioned primarily an aggressive policy of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine and its neighbours. Under the Russian influence, anti-European trends and Eurosceptic sentiments are growing. National 'egoism' is becoming an attractive alternative to integration.

Various NATO members have different views on solving the problem that seemed to have been solved long ago: protection against Russia's military pressure. Some seek opportunities to pacify Russia (those who are far from the Russian borders); others (who are closer and have their own historical experience of Russian aggression) call for resolute resistance to

Moscow. However, not everyone falls into these two groups. Hungary, for example, which experienced the Soviet invasion in 1956, openly cooperates with Putin. The Black Sea countries are also not so united in their assessments of the Russian threat. Bulgaria and Turkey tend to favour some NATO presence in the region; so NATO struggles to find a compromise. Both countries have close commercial ties and political contacts that significantly affect the development of relations between them and Russia. Overall, under current conditions, NATO has somewhat limited capabilities to respond most adequately to the challenges and threats that appear in the Black Sea area. So far, the main goal is to choose the most economically viable and militarily effective way to ensure security in the region that would allow NATO to demonstrate the Alliance's solidarity and to ensure the deterrence of further aggressive actions of Russia in the region. Moderate military build-up in the region is an appropriate response to the current situation.<sup>9</sup>

A somewhat provocative slogan "United Europe - from Lisbon to Vladivostok" can be heard not only from the Kremlin but also from many European capitals. Obviously, the task to build protection against the aggressive policy of Russia cannot be combined with the task of intensive political and economic cooperation with Russia. Ukraine is interested in a rigid and monolithic NATO and EU policy towards Russia, because it is an essential factor of its independent existence. Ukraine's position is shared by many in the European Union, particularly in Eastern European

<sup>8</sup> Варшавська декларація НАТО щодо трансатлантичної єдності, одностайно підтриманої всіма 28 країнами-членами альянсу, NATO, [[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133168.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133168.htm?selectedLocale=en)].

<sup>9</sup> NATO and Russia in the Black Sea: A New Confrontation?, CSIS, [<https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-russia-black-sea-new-confrontation>].

<sup>10</sup> Євросоюз: запекла дискусія між прихильниками і супротивниками незалежної України, "UkrInform", [<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politycs/2168676-evrosouz-zapekla-diskusija-miz-prihिल्nikami-ta-suprotivnikami-nezaleznoi-ukraini.html>].



countries, but there are many people who simply neglect the Ukrainian (and, to a large extent, their own) interests.<sup>10</sup>

According to President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, the cost of aggression should increase until Moscow begins to respect international norms. Sanctions are a tool that can deter the Kremlin and force it to change its behaviour. Strategic patience is required in order to restore peace and the rule of law. Poroshenko urges the West to wake up and understand that Russia is not going to stop its policy of aggression:

*The more we hesitate now, the more challenges we are going to face tomorrow. We need to act proactively and not simply react to further provocative steps by Moscow. We should not be afraid of Russia, and should not give in to it, either now or in the future. Let us surprise Russia with our determination, surprise Russia with the strength of our unity, and surprise Russia with our solidarity in the face of aggression. The West should recognize that security in Ukraine means security across the whole transatlantic community. Granting Ukraine modern facilities, including electronic equipment, radar blocker systems, is an investment in our common security, not only in the security of our state, because Ukraine is fighting not only for its independence but also for the future of the free world.<sup>11</sup>*

The West is to demonstrate that Russia is going to pay a high price for its aggressive behaviour, not only in the case of large-scale attacks involving weapons, but also in case of making so-called hybrid or cyber war. The policy of appeasement will not stop the aggressor, and any agreement with Russia

behind Ukraine's back will only worsen the situation.

Consequently, only joint efforts of Brussels and Washington might stop Russia. There should be one common position as to how to oppose it. This means not lifting sanctions until the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas are returned. The West could also help Ukraine become more resilient to the challenges and threats. The transatlantic community wants to see Russia as a partner that, firstly, respects the territorial integrity of its neighbours and does not use military force to intimidate; secondly, as a constructive partner in addressing both regional and global challenges; thirdly, as a transparent and reliable energy supplier to Europe; and finally, as an economically open, pluralistic state which respects human rights. However, such expectations are far from becoming true in the foreseeable time. In the coming years, the post-Soviet area will remain the zone of conflict, as Russia undermines all attempts of the region to reform and integrate itself into the Western system.<sup>12</sup>

One cannot help noticing some positive changes in the West's consolidation to respond to Russian actions. The economic influence of Russia on its neighbours and Europe is being reduced and this is caused both by the sanctions and by the falling prices of energy resources. Because of the sanctions, the European producers had to quickly shift to new markets, including the Chinese one. Western sanctions against Russia had at first seemed short-lived: The business community opposed them, and the attitude toward Russia in the European Union, which requires unanimity in foreign policy decisions, was anything

<sup>11</sup> Ціна агресії для Росії має зростати, "SocPortal", 06 April 2017, [socportal.info/2017/04/06/tsina\_agresiji\_dlja\_rosiji\_maje\_zrostati\_poroshenko.html].

<sup>12</sup> Західні експерти про глобальну і регіональну політику Росії, "VoA News", [http://www.ukrainian.voanews.com/a/russia-global-and-regional-politics/3329310.html].

but unanimous. But now, it seems unlikely that the transatlantic sanctions will end as sceptics predicted. The EU, which is so often perceived as “soft” towards Russia, has become a stronghold of the consolidated West.<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of May 2017, the former FBI Director James Comey stated that Russia is the biggest threat to all on the Earth, based on its intentions and capabilities. The words by Comey mean that the world is beginning to see the light as far as Russia is concerned.

Russian aggression is evolving according to a scenario, which the transatlantic community cannot respond to. Therefore, the events in Ukraine have emphasised the need to analyse all possible scenarios that may unfold beyond this hybrid war. New fundamental challenges to the unity of the transatlantic community are primarily associated with the Russian military aggression in Ukraine. Russian aggression has demonstrated clearly that the country has not only ignored the attempts to integrate to the Western partnership, but has rather attracted strategic investments in new military equipment and reduced the previous democratic reforms. The West should draw several conclusions from the events of recent years. First, Russia is deliberately trying to destabilise the European continent; so the United States and Europe must radically change their views on the European security. Second, the Russian party is showing a tendency towards unexpected actions and the West should carefully prepare for this. Third, Russia is using the full range of conventional and unconventional tools of intimidation and influence on its neighbours, and the West should develop innovative ways to confront these instruments.

The New Transatlantic Strategy includes first the renewal of transatlantic unity between the US and Europe, which has significantly weakened in recent years. The second component is a recovery of the deterrence strategy applied by the US and Europe in the Cold War. The third component is a resilience of the transatlantic community, which means the ability to prevent and solve the growing challenges ahead. This component also implies involving the expertise and cooperation of many participants, including those outside NATO. However, the Russian challenge does not yet seem to have been comprehended completely.

The final declaration of the G7 summit at the end of May 2017 is indicative in this respect. G7 leaders believe that the duration of sanctions against Russia are directly tied to the latter’s fulfilling its Minsk obligations and its respect for the sovereignty of Ukraine. They are ready to take additional measures to further increase Russia’s financial losses if it is required by Russia’s actions. Meanwhile, G7 reaffirmed their commitment to the policy of non-recognition of the Crimea annexation; however, sanctions were not mentioned. It was even noted that despite differences with Russia, they favour its involvement in resolving regional crises and common challenges.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, first, it is necessary to restore transatlantic unity, which has weakened in recent years. Also, it is necessary to transform the containment strategy applied by the US and Europe in the Cold War. The transatlantic community should be able to prevent and solve the growing challenges in advance. In this context, it is important to attract expertise and cooperation of many participants, including those outside NATO.

<sup>13</sup> We Built the Russia Sanctions to Last, “WSJ”, 20 March 2017, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/we-built-the-russia-sanctions-to-last-1490050833].

<sup>14</sup> G7 Taormina Leaders’ Communiqué, 27 May 2017, [http://www.g7italy.it/sites/default/files/documents/G7%20Taormina%20Leaders%27%20Communique\_27052017\_0.pdf].

Therefore, it is necessary to not only confirm transatlantic solidarity verbally, but also to ensure effective deterrence of the aggressor, increase the speed of NATO decision making, deepen the EU and NATO policies' coordination toward Russia. Russia is constantly trying to prove its case to the international community, using all possibilities. The power of propaganda, money, and other influences leads to the fact that Russia's standpoint is advocated not only by certain layers of the population, but also by certain political forces and politicians. The United States can play a central part in resolving the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, as well as in the negotiation and

strategic efforts to create conditions for its firm and final decision.

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