

# Hard, Soft, or Human?

## SECURITY DISCOURSES IN THE EU, NATO, AND RUSSIA

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### Introduction

How do Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's proposals for a new security architecture resonate in the foreign policy discourses of Russia's two main security partners: the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization? This memo analyzes several expert reports that grasp the wider context of security issues in the "Euro-Atlantic space." The documents focused on are the "Helsinki Plus" report of the EU-Russia Working Group, which was presented to the government of Spain in May 2010 when the country held the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union; "A Project for Europe," which was issued by the Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB) in October 2009; and the "NATO-2020" report, which was chaired by Madeleine Albright and issued in May 2010.<sup>1</sup>

These documents, to my mind, reveal deep gaps between Russia and the West in how they understand the nature of security and seek to strike balances between "hard" (military and state-centered) and "soft" (non-military and not necessarily state-centric) security dimensions. Russia buttresses the split between hard and soft security as supposedly two separate spheres, while the EU and NATO are in favor of a more comprehensive vision of security with no strict borders between hard and soft aspects. In the meantime, Russia appears to be skeptical about a value-ridden understanding of security, thus running up against the dominant logic within the EU and NATO.

### European Departures

The "Helsinki Plus" report was issued with the explicit purpose of formulating a response to Medvedev's November 2009 proposal for a new European security architecture. The purpose of this text was to create a basis for more deeply engaging

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<sup>1</sup> "Helsinki Plus: Towards a New Security Architecture in Europe," EU-Russia Study Group, LSE Global Governance and CIDOB, May 2010; "A Project for Europe. Reflections and Proposals for the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union," CIDOB and Circulo de Economia, October 2009; and "NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement," May 2010.

Russia in security dialogue, in spite of the obvious shortage of fresh and innovative ideas in the Russian president's proposal. This is why the report contains a number of points that visibly deviate from the dominant portrayal of the EU as a source of positive impulses for neighboring countries. The document admits that both the EU and Russia have inconsistent foreign policy stances. More specifically, the EU veers among being a soft normative power, a collection of sovereign states, and a junior partner of the United States. Russia, for its part, oscillates between a commitment to multilateralism and pluralism on the one hand, and a preoccupation with hard power and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs on the other. In politically correct terms, the "Helsinki Plus" report posits that both the EU and Russia are engaged in experimentation with their identities (post-national in the case of the EU and post-imperial in the case of Russia). By the same token, both Moscow and Brussels see themselves as security providers, but they also need to understand that other countries sometimes perceive them as sources of insecurity. The report does recognize that there is a need for new security arrangements on the European continent, which is justified by a lack of mutual recognition and confidence between Western and Eurasian security organizations.

What then follows in the report is a series of multiple language games. The basic strategy of the "Helsinki Plus" report is to juxtapose some of the concepts seemingly close to the Kremlin discourse with those that reflect more of a European approach to security. Thus, the document states that "we live in a more multipolar and multilateral world." Arguably, the first adjective corresponds to the Russian vision of international relations, while the second one invokes the European vision. The same goes for the peculiar interpretation of the idea of indivisibility of security, which is deeply embedded in the Russian discourse: the report assumes that "European security is indivisibly linked to global security." This statement can be unpacked as an explicit signal sent to Moscow; if Russia wishes to seriously discuss security matters with the EU, it has to develop a more pronounced global security agenda and therefore address issues of resource depletion, transparency, sustainable development, transborder migration, environmental protection, climate change, infectious diseases, and the like.

There is another overt message in the text: that cooperation in security is a precondition to cooperation in the economic sphere, including modernization. In other words, if Medvedev expects to receive EU support in his cherished – yet still hollow – project of modernization, he should understand that this support will be contingent on Russia's cooperation with the EU on security issues. It is at this point that the concept of human security, which is not very popular in the Kremlin, comes into play. Again, the introduction of this concept in the report was done in a way that cannot be dismissed by Russia in its capacity as the successor to the Soviet Union: human security was implicitly presented as encompassing the "three baskets" of the Helsinki Accords (1975), signed by the Soviet Union. More specifically, the baskets are currently defined by the report as follows. Human security is about the security of individuals and the communities in which they live (the third basket of the Accords). It is about material and physical security, about life-threatening risks that emanate from poverty or from

natural disasters and require economic cooperation (the second basket). And it is about the extension of rule-governed as opposed to war-based security (the first basket).

The explicit linkage to the Helsinki Accords constitutes a good platform for deepening Russian–EU relations on the basis of a European understanding of human security that blurs the difference between “internal” and “external,” and “hard” and “soft.” Against this backdrop, human security features as a less politicized type of security, as compared to its military-strategic forms, since it stands for the protection of the universal rights of people everywhere. It is about the right to be protected, not about the right of outside powers to interfere in the internal affairs of other states under the guise of humanitarian concerns – a declaration meant to avoid accusations of egoistic interests against the strongest states that presumably stand behind humanitarian interventions. In an attempt to reconcile the most acute disagreements between Russia and the West, the report admits that neither the 1999 Kosovo war nor the 2008 Georgia war can be described in human security terms. In an even more explicit effort to establish a common post-conflict communicative terrain, the report suggests that in the Caucasus, security remains elusive not because breakaway territories remain unrecognized, but because people in the region are isolated, suffer from dysfunctional governance, and cannot earn a living.

In addressing energy relations, the “Helsinki Plus” report recommends a basket of different approaches. What could be of some interest to the Russian side is the appeal to de-politicize and, presumably, de-securitize energy relations, by dropping their articulation in politically divisive categories that entail security effects. Yet it is hard to expect that the idea of “universal access to energy” might find a warm reception in the Kremlin. Some sort of resistance from the Russian side can be expected as soon as attempts emerge to look at energy relations through the prism of transparency mechanisms, which necessarily entail addressing profit flows and their use for sustainable economic development.

The CIDOB’s “A Project for Europe” report echoes some of the points mentioned above. It claims that the European center of gravity is gradually shifting toward the East, thereby implying recognition of the importance of Russia as a key partner in the EU’s security strategy. Another CIDOB argument – that the idea of a “neighborhood” is unsatisfactory since it places all adjacent countries in one category – may also please the Russian government, which for many years has argued that it deserves special treatment by Brussels.

However, “A Project for Europe” also strikes another tone. It reiterates a vision of the EU as a global player, arguing that “human security is European security.” This statement seems to be of crucial importance for the future course of EU–Russian relations. It suggests that the EU’s support for Russia’s attempts to restructure the Euro-Atlantic security space is conditioned upon Moscow’s embrace of a more human-oriented perspective on security and a stronger cosmopolitan worldview.

## **NATO's Conceptual Horizons**

The "NATO 2020" report gives a good perspective on the dynamics of the Alliance's security perspectives for the next decade. It clearly states that NATO is an organization that lends muscle to democratic ideals – a thesis that Russia seems to question. Mainly in line with the above mentioned EU discursive strategy, the NATO report tries to combine assumptions welcomed by countries like Russia with more restrictive and potentially exclusive conditions. While a "rule-based international order" is exactly what Medvedev seeks to achieve, the "NATO 2020" report argues that this order has to be grounded in institutional links between "partners of values," which makes Russia's deep participation in it very much in doubt. The NATO text also delineates an extended vision of security that includes disruptions to energy and maritime supply lines, assistance in constructing more stable societies, dealing with environmental decay and climate change, addressing minority protection and gender equality, and demographic changes that aggravate problems of hunger, migration, and large-scale epidemics. This explicit and arguably deliberate mixture of hard and soft security arrangements raises the question of whether NATO and Russia actually share a common understanding of security.

## **Policy Implications**

Both the "Helsinki Plus" report, which situates human security across (and above) hard and soft dimensions, and the "NATO-2020" report, which sees little point in drawing lines of separation between the two facets of security, consent to increasingly murky and fuzzy borders between hard and soft security. Yet this way of reasoning, dominant in the West, stands in sharp contrast to Russia's intentional re-actualization of their separation. According to the logic of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, soft security already has its institutionalized forms and therefore does not require new approaches, which allegedly is not the case with the hard security (military and strategic) domain.

What stands behind Lavrov's logic is a motivation beyond simply pushing aside a soft security agenda as something supposedly already settled. Specifically, Russia deems that in the hard security terrain, it possesses critical material resources and is a powerful player, while in the soft security realm, it is considered as either a source of destabilization in environmental, migration, and human trafficking matters or as a nascent and therefore unreliable practitioner of soft power. Consequently, the acceptance of soft power as a viable security platform, in contrast to hard security, necessitates deep domestic change in Russia. A commitment to a soft security policy presupposes Russia's willingness to adapt to a series of international norms, the effects of which may be painful – if acceptable at all – to the governing elites in Moscow.

Presumably, at this juncture the West does have its own arguments. It is exactly because of its convincing experience in tackling soft security issues that the West may share it with Russia, thus testing the Kremlin's intentions to comprehensively change obsolete practices of governance. Additionally, as many European experts deem, the problem of security in the Caucasus does not concern the lack of legally binding

agreements that hypothetically could prevent Georgia from undertaking military action against separatist territories, as Medvedev claims, but in the gap between hard and soft security mechanisms and procedures that has to be bridged on the basis of recognizing the primordial importance of human security.

It is at this point that Russia's disadvantage in entering into a security debate with the West becomes clear. By unleashing discussions about the revision of Euro-Atlantic security arrangements, Medvedev has opened up a Pandora's box of different interpretations of security, not all of which are necessarily welcome to the Kremlin. The EU and NATO are taking the opportunity to reframe the debate by promoting an extended vision of security, thereby testing Russia's resolution to think comprehensively about it.

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