

## Chapter 11

# A Bridge Too Far? How to Prevent the Unraveling of Western Policies toward Wider Europe

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The question of Western unity of purpose vis-à-vis eastern Europe is as vexing as it is old. During the Cold War the issue was framed in terms of Western solidarity in the face of potential Soviet military aggression as well as the unity of overall approaches concerning the Soviet Union and wider European security. In its crudest form the question was put in binary fashion; the West was seen as having two options—either hanging together or hanging separately. During the post-Cold War era the question lost most of its salience and was replaced with a perhaps more technocratic question concerning the mutual complementarity of visions and actions: is the West more—or perhaps less—than the sum of its parts in terms of effecting positive change beyond its boundaries, and how do the different actors and policies relate to and interact with each other? In the final analysis the question boiled down to the West’s ability to guide and support the transition of the eastern part of the continent towards liberal democracy and market economy.<sup>1</sup>

It goes without saying that wider Europe (the set of countries that have come to reside between the enlarged NATO/EU and Russia) has been an integral part of these developments. Yet I would maintain that it makes no sense to speak of the region in isolation from Russia. In fact, it can be argued that it has been precisely the West’s stubborn attempts at decoupling the two that have resulted in the current conflict in Ukraine and the wider impasse in relations with Russia. Indeed, since the early 1990s the West’s propensity to view the region through the lens of ‘Russia First’<sup>2</sup> has created a situation where in most instances the other countries in the region have been treated almost as an afterthought, with Russia’s nationalistic and post-imperial tendencies being strengthened in the process.

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of Democracy (2014) “Reconsidering the Transition Paradigm,” Special Section, *Journal of Democracy*, 25 (1): 86–100.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Truscott (1997) *Russia First. Breaking with the West* (London: I. B. Tauris).

This is not to say that the West should accept at face value Russia's claim at a privileged sphere of influence—or interests, for that matter,<sup>3</sup> it is simply an assertion that to devise and execute policies void of the wider context that includes the Russia factor are bound to remain problematic, to say the least. This is also the message that Russia itself has tried to convey with its actions in and over Ukraine: certain key developments in the region will simply not be tolerated if they go against the grain of Russia's essential interests, almost no matter what the associated price tag may be.

This article discusses the role that the West—the U.S./NATO and the EU—have played in the developments in eastern Europe, widely understood. Although the main focus of the article is on recent events, background concerning earlier post-Cold War strategies is necessary. The discussion proceeds in three stages. First, earlier post-Cold War settings and strategies are briefly discussed. The following section analyzes more recent developments. The third and final section draws some conclusions about the future of relations between the West and Russia over and in wider Europe, while pondering what the necessary ingredients to arrive at a more effective strategy should be. The main conclusion of this article nevertheless is that the West is in dire danger of losing its ability to shape wider Europe for the better.

### **The Post-Cold War Setting and Western Policies toward Wider Europe**

The end of the Cold War division and the dissolution of the Soviet Union that soon ensued opened up the political space in Europe. The rigid bipolar confrontation gave way to a much more fluid setting where fresh opportunities and challenges rapidly mushroomed. This called for new policies on part of both the United States and the emerging European Union. For the United States, the four main objectives were: (i) managing the transition to a new post-Cold War order in a peaceful and orderly fashion; (ii) facilitating the emergence of Russia as a successor state of the Soviet Union as a responsible and constructive player, including the development of cooperative threat reduction with Russia

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<sup>3</sup> Dmitri Trenin (2009) "Russia's Sphere of *Interest*, not *Influence*," *Washington Quarterly*, 32 (4): 3–22.

to deal with the toxic assets left behind by the Soviet Union; (iii) ensuring the primacy of NATO—and consequently also the United States—in European security, first of all by ensuring the continued viability of NATO while downplaying the potential of the EU to emerge as a fully independent security actor; while (iv) still continuing to use that very EU as a proxy to organise the political and economic integration and consequent transition in the emerging wider Europe.<sup>4</sup>

This is not the occasion to give a thorough analysis of whether and to what extent the United States has succeeded in these tasks. Suffice it to say, that by and large, the United States was successful. It was able to secure an unrivalled position at the top of the international hierarchy but was also able to stabilize the conflicts on European territory in the 1990s and to lock the majority of the continent into its preferred security structure through the expansion of NATO.<sup>5</sup> Even if Russia made some dissatisfied noises at the time, there was an expectation that these could be successfully placated by offering Russia some privileged forms of partnership with the West and the United States in particular.<sup>6</sup> The countries eventually residing in the common neighborhood between the enlarged Alliance and Russia—wider Europe—were mainly an afterthought and were given the status of ‘partners’ through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

Turning to the EU, the most significant aspect of developments in the early 1990s was the fact that the EU started to express ambitions and develop capacities for increased willingness and ability to have its own indigenous views about international affairs and to develop them into its own policies and actions on the world stage. In this respect the adoption of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 was of particular significance, as it created fresh instruments of external action and institutionalized a cooperative culture that over time have resulted in impressive (although perhaps needlessly cumbersome) finesse and complexity in today’s European

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of key U.S. tenets, see James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul (2003) *Power and Purpose. U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings); Strobe Talbott (2002) *The Russia Hand. A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House); and Angela Stent (2014) *The Limits of Partnership. U.S. –Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Mastanduno (1997) “Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War”. *International Security*, 21 (4): 49–88.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald D. Asmus (2002) *Opening NATO’s Door. How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press).

Union.<sup>7</sup> Primarily this stage was one where the EU was effectively thrust into assuming a leading role in responding to the economic effects of the dissolution of the Soviet empire. Initially the EU also sought to assume, and failed, to play a role in stabilizing the violent tendencies unleashed by the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Indeed, the EU's inability to respond to the escalating crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina in any meaningful and effective manner resulted in a general disillusionment over the EU's general ability to act as an effective force in stabilizing its own backyard.<sup>8</sup> It also underlined the still indispensable role that the United States played, and continues to play, in European security.

The objectives of the nascent European foreign policy and those of the United States in the early 1990s were largely compatible with and even complementary to each other. Therefore, the EU's Eastern enlargement was clearly in the U.S. interests while the expansion of NATO was seen as the key in stabilising central and eastern Europe with a view to smoothing and paving the way for the eventual and in certain respects much more demanding EU accession.<sup>9</sup> At the same time the fact that these two institutions did move and enlarge in lock-step created the expectation, perhaps even fear, in Moscow that this would be the case also in future. Whether this perception was justified is a moot point as it seems evident that Russia has taken it as a starting point in its own foreign and security policy becoming increasingly paranoid about the Western penetration of its 'near abroad' in the process.<sup>10</sup>

One way to characterize the role the two played and the relationship they enjoyed is to think of two concentric hegemonies. U.S. global primacy set the liberal and benign overall framework in which the EU's own attempts at hegemonic ordering of the European continent and beyond took place.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the policies of the United

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<sup>7</sup> See Stephan Keukeleire and Tom Delreux (2014) *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*. Second edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

<sup>8</sup> Elfriede Regelsberger and Wolfgang Wessels (1996) "The CFSP institutions and procedures: A third way for the second pillar". *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 1 (1): 29–54, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Baun (2004) "The Implications of EU Enlargement for the United States," *Perspectives*, No. 21 (Winter 2003/04): 27–38; Steven McGuire and Michael Smith (2008) *The European Union and the United States. Competition and Convergence in the Global Arena* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 222–225.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Stefan Meister (ed.) (2013) *Economisation versus Power Ambitions: Rethinking Russia's Policy towards Post-Soviet States* (Berlin: Nomos).

<sup>11</sup> Hiski Haukkala (2008) "The European Union as a Regional Normative Hegemon: The Case of European Neighbourhood Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60 (9): 1601–1622.

States/NATO and the EU were mutually reinforcing and suggested a natural division of labour on the European continent. The United States would guarantee security (through the expansion of NATO) and through its primacy set global parameters, while the EU would take the main responsibility for stabilizing the European setting through the enlargement of its institutions and/or projection of its policies through modes of external governance<sup>12</sup> in directions where a rapid and full immersion into the EU was not viewed as an option.

Having established this, one should be wary of assigning too much strategic intentionality on the part of either the United States or the EU. On the contrary, an analysis of the evolution of their responses to the unfolding events in the 1990s has shown that both were proceeding on the basis of trial and error and that the hegemonic underpinnings of their policies were arrived at in a piecemeal, almost haphazard manner. In a word, both NATO's and the EU's eventual *Sprung nach Osten* were more reactions and responses to events and demands beyond their control or initial appetite rather than preconceived programs to order or subjugate eastern Europe to their will.<sup>13</sup> That said, none of this necessarily detracts from the eventual effects and ramifications of these policies, and even if it did, the fact remains that Russia, as will be discussed below, has chosen to frame the issue increasingly in this manner.

In hindsight, and regardless of its origins, this two-pronged approach proved remarkably successful: the transition to a new post-Cold War order in Europe, although fraught with dangers, was achieved in a largely peaceful and orderly fashion. The conflicts particularly in the former Yugoslavia were pacified and the region was steered towards the path of eventual EU accession. Although a set of 'frozen' conflicts were left simmering in the east, both the EU and NATO were successful in answering the calls for accession from central and east European countries, resulting in an increasingly hegemonic, even unipolar setting in Europe. Even in cases where full immersion into Western structures was not in the cards, as in Russia and the rest of the Newly Independent States (NIS) in the former Soviet Union, the objective was to eventually tie them as well into this new Western-centric architecture.

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<sup>12</sup> Sandra Lavenex (2004) "EU External Governance in 'Wider Europe,'" *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11 (4): 680–700.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion, see Asmus, op. cit.; Karen Elizabeth Smith (1999) *The Making of EU Foreign Policy: The Case of Eastern Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan).

## **A Bridge Too Far? The Russian Challenge to Western Policies toward Wider Europe**

If history had really ended in lockstep with the 20<sup>th</sup> century our story would probably have a happy ending. But since the early 2000s a series of developments have taken place that have both aggravated the situation on the European continent while also increasingly putting the notion of Western transatlantic harmony into doubt, especially when it comes to wider Europe. Paradoxically, the root cause for the mounting problems seems to be a host of unintended consequences of the very successes of the West, particularly the rapid and successful expansion of its key institutions towards the east as well as the handling of the crises in the Balkans in the 1990s. These issues had the combined effect of aggravating relations between Russia and the West, and the United States in particular. As such, wider Europe has increasingly turned into a theatre where increased Russian–Western rivalries are played out.

First and foremost, the question of NATO enlargement(s) to the east has proven an object of bitter contention between Russia and the West. The Russian contestation to NATO's enlargement has taken mainly two forms. On the one hand, Russians argue that the United States and the West have betrayed a promise given to Gorbachev already at the end of the Cold War that NATO would not expand beyond the boundaries of unified Germany. Although U.S. officials at the time did perhaps exercise some ambiguity in terms of wording, not a rare occurrence in the world of diplomacy, it seems safe to conclude that no such explicit pledge was ever given.<sup>14</sup> The second strand of criticism stems from the perceived threat of a Western military alliance moving closer to the Russian heartland. Western policymakers probably do not recognize the bogey man that Moscow has been painting of their intentions and actions. But once again we are faced with a situation where this need not matter: Russia has chosen to frame the issue in these terms and has shown that it will act accordingly. Russia's framing and consequent reactions, not the hopes and intentions of Western policymakers, have become the main driving force on this occasion as well.

Related to this is the wider Russian complaint concerning the role the United States has played globally. U.S. post-Cold War primacy in gen-

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<sup>14</sup>Asmus, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–7; Mark Kramer (2009) "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia." *Washington Quarterly*, 32 (2): 39–61.

eral and the way Washington chose to respond to the 9/11 terrorist strikes in particular accentuated the Russian impression of a rampant United States bent on dominating Russia and the world unilaterally. In Vladimir Putin's spectacular and resentful words, uttered already in 2006–07, "the wolf knows who to eat... and is not about to listen to anyone" and that, as a consequence, the United States had "overstepped its national borders in every way."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, positioning itself as a counterforce to a reckless and overly domineering United States has become the leitmotif of Putin's rhetoric and Russian foreign policy in recent years.

Although not felt as keenly at the time, EU enlargement has also created frictions between Russia and the West. In particular, the question of a 'common neighbourhood' (a term never accepted by Russians, by the way) created in the aftermath of the 'Big Bang' eastern enlargement of 2004 has proven to be a source of problems. In particular, Ukraine's Orange Revolution—which took both the EU and Russia by surprise—changed Moscow's tack concerning the role the EU played in the region. Moscow's previous indifference subsided and it began to view the EU's growing role and the Western orientation of CIS countries with increasing suspicion.<sup>16</sup> Although it was not appreciated at the time, the Orange Revolution was the starting gun for the preparation of operations and practices witnessed first in Georgia in 2008 and then in Crimea and eastern Ukraine since 2014.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the Kosovo war in 1999 and its diplomatic aftermath proved to be highly disruptive. For Russia, the Kosovo case drove home at least two lessons that made a lasting impact on its subsequent relations with the West, the EU included.<sup>18</sup> The first lesson was that the United States, and to a lesser degree also the EU member states, were prepared to use military intervention to effect regime change in cases where they

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<sup>15</sup>Vladimir Putin (2006) *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, Moscow, May 10, 2006, available at [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823\\_type70029type82912\\_105566.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/05/10/1823_type70029type82912_105566.shtml), last accessed 28 October 2015; and Vladimir Putin (2007) *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, February 10, 2007, available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/552>, last accessed 28 October 2015.

<sup>16</sup>Igor Gretskiy, Evgeny Treshchenkov and Konstantin Golubev (2014) "Russia's perceptions and misperceptions of the EU Eastern Partnership." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47, 3–4: 375–383.

<sup>17</sup>Ulrike Franke (2015) *War by non-military means. Understanding Russian information warfare*. FOR-R-4065-SE, March 2015 (Stockholm: FOI).

<sup>18</sup>Derek Averre (2009) "From Pristina to Tskhinvali: The Legacy of Operation Allied Force in Russia's Relations with the West." *International Affairs*, 85 (3): 575–591.

see fit. The second lesson was that unilateral military intervention can take place without an explicit mandate from the UN Security Council and against the voiced objection of the Russian Federation in particular. This is a pattern Russia has continuously perceived in other color revolutions in the post-Soviet area, including recently in Middle East and North Africa. Taken together, the Kosovo affair had the wider implication of distancing Russia from the West, the EU included, paving the way for the galvanization of a much more hard-nosed realist foreign policy consensus during the Putin era.<sup>19</sup>

These tensions have been exacerbated by the fact that countries in wider Europe have presented the West with their own challenges. To begin with, countries in the region are usually weak states with limited administrative capacity. Corruption is entrenched. They are often divided states, either physically, as is the case with Georgia or Moldova, or mentally and politically when it comes to their place in Europe, as is the case with Ukraine. As a consequence, these countries have faced severe limitations in their ability and even basic willingness to engage in the kinds of reforms propagated by the West.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the element of competition between the EU and Russia has not gone unnoticed by the countries residing in-between. In fact, this constellation has invited and enabled a recurring political pattern where the states in the 'common neighborhood' have alternated their allegiances between the EU and Russia, always looking for a better political and economic deal. Therefore, instead of fully Europeanizing or falling loyally into Russia's orbit, the countries have used the two protagonists as bargaining chips and sources of political leverage to buttress their own sovereignty and freedom of maneuver.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, neither the West nor Russia has managed to achieve its aims, and both have been played off one another by the countries-in-between. Moreover, this process has fed a feeling of latent competition

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<sup>19</sup>Dmitri Trenin (2007) "Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West," *Washington Quarterly*, 30 (2): 95–105.

<sup>20</sup>See Elena Gnedina and Evghenia Sleptsova(2012) *Eschewing Choice: Ukraine's Strategy on Russia and the EU*, CEPS Working Document No. 360, January 2012, <http://www.ceps.eu/book/eschewing-choice-ukraine%E2%80%99s-strategy-russia-and-eu>, last accessed 29 October 2015.

<sup>21</sup>Nicu Popescu and Andrew Wilson (2009), *The Limits of Enlargement-lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations).



in the region, eroding trust and hindering the development of cooperation further afield, in effect acting as an important backdrop to the current conflict between Russia and the West.

The challenges for the EU are further complicated by the strong Russian presence in the region. Russia has on its own initiative been excluded from the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), but it is nevertheless a player (in one form or another) in all of the conflicts in the region, and has remained far from disinterested when it comes to the development of these countries' ties with the West.

The conflict in Ukraine can be seen as a culmination of all of these unhappy trends. This is not the place to discuss the conflict in any detail.<sup>22</sup> Suffice it to say that it has unearthed a set of divergences within the Western camp as well as between the West and Russia that account for the gestation of the conflict as well as point out to some future challenges for the West, both in terms of handling the negative tendencies and in preserving unity.

Starting with the United States, it would be erroneous to argue that Washington is a disinterested party to events in wider Europe. On the contrary, the strong role the United States has played in fostering Western unity over the conflict in Ukraine shows that Washington is anything but disinterested. At the same time, U.S. interests are mainly geostrategic, i.e., to deal with the wider security setting in Europe and the potential military challenge posed by Russia. This leads to two consequences related to the role the United States can be expected to play in the region. First, since the war in Georgia in 2008 and the reset that followed a year later, the significance of wider Europe on its own merits has been downplayed by the United States—a development that has not gone unnoticed in Moscow and one that can be seen as a potential background factor influencing Russia's growing willingness to make its claim for a recognized sphere of influence in wider Europe increasingly public and the eventual decision to back this claim by resorting to violence in reacting to the events in Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>For useful works in this respect, see Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer (2015) *Conflict in Ukraine. Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press); Andrew Wilson (2014) *Ukraine Crisis: What it Mean for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

<sup>23</sup>See Bobo Lo (2015) *Russia and the New World Disorder* (London and Washington D.C.: Chatham House and Brookings), pp. 171–72.

Second, the United States needs to balance its role and commitments in wider Europe, and indeed in wider European security, with developments and challenges elsewhere in the world, including the volatile Middle East and the dynamics in Asia. On the one hand this accentuates U.S. stakes in Europe, as Russia's challenge and the U.S. response can be seen as a test case concerning U.S. resolve and ability to handle regional security challengers in general. On the other hand, notwithstanding its recent increase in relevance the European theatre can still be envisaged as of being secondary importance, an unnecessary drain on scarce U.S. resources that could be better spent elsewhere. From a Russian perspective this opens up potential avenues for probing whether an understanding with the United States about the future of wider Europe could be reached. One way to read the role Russia has played in Iran and Syria is to signal to Washington that, depending on the case and the context, Moscow can be either an asset or a liability, and that if the two could reach agreement over Ukraine and the rest of wider Europe, Russia might be willing to act more in the former capacity. Whether this is an offer the U.S. or the wider West could ever trust or accept is an entirely different matter, of course.

Turning to the European Union, since its eastern enlargement in the early 2000s the region has been one of the main issues on its external agenda. For example, one of the three strategic objectives in the 2003 Security Strategy was building security in the EU's neighbourhood.<sup>24</sup> Geographical proximity alone ensures that the EU needs to address the issues much more seriously and in a more comprehensive manner than the United States. In addition, due to its own nature as a value-driven regional integration project, the EU's essential objectives and tools have differed somewhat from those of the United States. Therefore, instead of adopting a geostrategic perspective, the EU has pursued a values-driven approach where good governance and economic reforms have been promoted with a view of tying Europe's east, Russia included, into a wider European economic and political area. These differences have not shielded the EU from Russian criticism, as it was long hoped or believed, as the EU has, whether it intended it or not, started to challenge and even erode the viability and legitimacy of Russian approaches in wider Europe.

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<sup>24</sup>European Council (2003) *A Secure Europe in a Better World—European Security Strategy*, Brussels 12 December 2003, p. 7.

Russia considers wider Europe to be of primary, even overriding geopolitical interest. With its actions Russia has made abundantly clear that it views the region a no-go zone for both the EU and NATO and that is willing to use all the means at its disposal to enforce this policy and pay a high price in terms of economic hardship and international, although mainly Western, opprobrium in doing so. The reasons for this are myriad and stem mainly from Russia's own domestic development; they need not be discussed on this occasion.<sup>25</sup> The main point worth stressing here is that the near-existential nature of Russian interests in and over wider Europe create an asymmetry that is unfavorable to the West: no matter how hard the West pushes its policies in the east, Moscow is always willing to push back a little harder. This has been reflected in the efficacy of Western responses to the conflict in Ukraine, where instead of capitulating—as was perhaps hoped by the West—Russia insisted both on its own objectives and the chosen hybrid modus operandi of continued destabilization of Ukraine. The combined effect of differences in stakes and Russia's acumen to play to its relative strengths sub-regionally have resulted and will continue result in significant hardships for the West if and when it hopes to continue keep pushing for its policies in wider Europe.

## Conclusions

The present situation finds the key Western actors in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, a great deal has been accomplished: key institutions have enlarged successfully and as a consequence the geographical heart of Europe has been stabilized. On the other hand, Russia's angry response to the continued eastward drift of these policies and institutions tests the continuation of these practices as well as some successes we have already been accustomed to take for granted. This will spell continued challenges and even hardships for the West in and over wider Europe.

The tragic turn of events in Ukraine in early 2014 was a wake-up call to Western assumptions. Russia decided to check the growing presence of both NATO and the EU in the East and launched a wide-ranging hybrid conflict against Ukraine, and by extension the EU and the West.

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<sup>25</sup>For a wonderful exposition of this issue, see Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy (2015) *Mr. Putin—Operative in Kremlin*, Second edition (Washington, D.C.: Brookings).

These developments have in effect nullified the EU's approach towards the region as well as forced the United States to become much more engaged in European security and the EU's neighborhood yet again. Although it is clear that the U.S. role is indispensable in stabilizing the security situation in Europe, the fact that such a posture is once again required is hardly a welcome development. On the contrary, the whole Europe, including Russia, risks losing most of the co-operative security gains achieved during the post-Cold War era.

Yet the Western record is not entirely negative. To a degree, the 2000s had already showcased the potential for a fruitful division of labor between the EU and the United States. By accentuating the EU's role especially in its eastern neighborhood adjacent to Russia, the ENP offered a way for developing a mutually beneficial division of labor over the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>26</sup> For the EU, this offered a chance to make good on its earlier rhetoric about 'the hour of Europe' in the early 1990s. For the United States this offered an opportunity to divert attention and resources away from the region that could be put to a better use in other troubled hot spots of perhaps greater strategic importance to the United States than eastern Europe. A theatre where this approach has worked has been the Western Balkans, where the EU has relieved the United States from both peacekeeping and crisis-management duties as well as taken the lead in the civilian management and stabilization of the region through the stabilization and association process since November 2000.

By assuming greater responsibility over the Balkans, the EU has carried its own share of the transatlantic burden. At the same time it has manifestly failed to repeat the feat and act as an engine of stability in wider Europe. To a large degree this stems from the fact that, and unlike in the western Balkans, the EU has had to operate in an environment where a regional hegemon has actively sought to challenge and undermine its policies. But the EU itself is also to blame, as its current and, as it seems growing, immersion in successive and overlapping crises is in danger of creating highly unstable dynamics also within the EU itself. The slowly simmering crisis within the EU risks becoming a systemic malaise, potentially overshadowing the future development and even the very viability of the European project itself. This is, or at least

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<sup>26</sup>For a discussion, see Hiski Haukkala (2008) "The European Neighborhood Policy". In Sven Biscop and Johan Lemke (eds.), *EU Enlargement and Transatlantic Alliance: A Security Relationship in Flux* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner): 159–172.

should be, a cause for concern not only for the EU and its member states but for the United States as well, which has sought to use the EU as a tool for stabilizing the European continent. A failure of the EU is a risk that neither EU member states nor the United States can afford. The only party that would seem to gain from such a turn of events would be Russia, although it is hard to see how an increasingly dysfunctional EU could be in its long-term interests, either.

The fact remains that the West is in for a very difficult time in and over wider Europe. The countries themselves will pose a set of difficult challenges and will be anything but easy partners. Russian belligerence is not likely to disappear in the nearest future, either. On the contrary, Russia is more likely to seek to challenge Western policies in the region as well as question and seek to undermine the domestic cohesion and solidarity of these countries. This leaves the West with the unenviable task of managing these challenges in a situation in which the essential interests of the United States and the EU are anything but identical. For the EU in particular a time of trials and tribulations seems to be in the offing, as it will have to try to deal with these issues while combating increased dysfunctionality and sclerosis at home. One is indeed hard pressed to remain optimistic about any of the issues discussed in this article.

In the final analysis, the main challenge for Western actors across the board is to adopt a more coherent and thoughtful response to wider Europe. As was argued previously, a great deal of the evolution of Western policies towards the area can be explained by happenstance. In the current and tense situation this will no longer suffice. For the moment the only actor that has a comprehensive view and approach to wider Europe is Russia. This enables Moscow to control the essential conflict dynamics as well as ensure that it can play to its own strengths. The West, by comparison, remains stuck in a reactive mode, (over)burdened by a host of other issues and crises and slowed down by the cumbersome process of internal coordination and negotiation as well as by institutional rivalries.

This applies in particular to the EU, but the United States does not escape reproach either. As a consequence Western policy remains adrift, with Russia controlling the pace of events. In the process Moscow has been able to desensitize the West into accepting things that were seen as entirely unacceptable only a while ago. For example, the West's initial nightmare scenario in Ukraine, namely a frozen conflict in Donbas, seems more recently to have become the preferred scenario. This strate-

gic drift in Western objectives, if continued, will ensure that Russia will eventually reach its objectives in Ukraine, as to a degree it already has. Moreover, if it manages successfully to call the Western and perhaps in particular the EU bluff over sanctions, it seems safe to conclude that Russia will not only be able to achieve its immediate aims in Ukraine but that a larger challenge and an eventual roll back of Western policy towards wider Europe could be around the corner.

This does not need to entail that the Western policy towards wider Europe need remain a bridge too far. To avert this eventuality a serious re-think of Western policies is required. If the West is to play its game more successfully it must, firstly, learn the right lessons from its earlier policies. Pointing these out has been the aim of this chapter. Second, the key Western actors need to acknowledge that the challenge is and will remain strategic and will require some head-on collisions with Russia in certain issues while avoiding conflict in others. It also means strategic patience and the ability to assess and decide when the stakes are too high for overall European security. A game of chicken, which at times seems to have been in the offing in the East, is not a particularly safe sport. Indeed, the underlying concern is that the auto pilot mode of Western responses—ambitious on surface, timid in implementation—to the current crisis may result in further sleepwalking into another and potentially much bigger clash with Russia. It is high time for the West to acknowledge the radically altered nature of the game in wider Europe and to start to act accordingly, carefully weighing possibilities and risks, options and dangers. This will pose demands on both sides of the Atlantic: the EU must come of age as a strategic, although not necessarily a fully-fledged security actor, and the United States, and by extension NATO, must remain intimately involved in European security. It seems likely that the question of Western unity of purpose and vision of eastern Europe is set to remain relevant for quite some time.