

European Security: With or Without Russia?

Hosted and moderated by: Prof. Alexey Gromyko, Director, Institute of Europe (Russian Academy of Sciences), Chairman, Russian Association of European Studies (AES)

The discussion has shown that the option "without" do not attract any visible interest among experts. Participants, on the contrary, focused on key issues of reconciling and reorganizing European security embracing the whole continent. Most attention was focused on figuring out what should be done to restore confidence in Europe, what are mechanisms and instruments to relaunch dialogue between Russia and western countries. The resumption of the NRC meetings was assessed positively although with a cautious optimism in light of the forthcoming NATO summit in Warsaw. In general, views varied including those who favor the tactics of "small steps" and those who stand for "big ideas" and break-through projects to repair the fabric of European security.

Noteworthy, the question "who is threatening whom in Europe?" turned out to be purely rhetorical during the debate and instead participants looked for ways to restore dialogue and confidence. The idea that the EU and NATO cannot build a Europe of stability and peace ignoring Russia was prominent in the discussion.

Another important thesis is that political cooperation is durable when it is coupled with strong economic ties. Meanwhile Russia and the West are separated by sanctions. A solution lies in dealing together with outstanding political issues simultaneously with liberating economic cooperation from straight jacket of current political confrontation. Apart from moral, humanitarian and human rights shortcomings of the sanction regime, it is unacceptable because it has not worked while hurting all sides involved.

Any EU's and NATO's policy decisions (Global Strategy, Warsaw Summit) are not going to succeed in the long run if they do not take into account: (a) the national interests of Russia, its concerns about regional and global security on the basis of common approaches towards international law; (b) a necessity for pan-European reconciliation between different integration projects; (c) the risk of further fragmentation of Europe in case if its different parts continue to drift apart, while internal and external challenges pile up.

Small steps approach, including the example of cooperation between Russian and the US military in Syria, is useful tactically, in particular in order to forestall further escalation of political and military tensions in Europe. However, it is even more important to promote European strategic thinking and to restart deliberations on the pan-European hard and soft security system through the OSCE, the EU – Eurasian Economic Union dialogue, NRC, the EU – Russia political mechanisms. To this end the "second track" diplomacy is of utmost importance to assist politicians and diplomats.