

Round Table - Russia, Ukraine and the European Union

Chairwoman:

Sandra KALNIETE MEP, *Vice-Chairwoman of the EPP Group in the EP responsible for the WG on Neighbourhood Policy and Euronest*

Panellists:

Andrej PLENKOVIC MEP, *Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee and Chairman of the Delegation for Ukraine in the EP*

Jeffrey GEDMIN, *Senior Fellow at Georgetown University, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue*

Henrik BREITENBAUCH, *Director, Centre for Military Studies, University of Copenhagen*

Miguel MONJARDINO, *Portuguese Catholic University*

Introduction:

The annexation of Crimea is a fundamental shift in geopolitics. We are no longer in the post-Cold War but in a new third phase that has yet to be defined; one that fundamentally challenges the EU's legalistic vision of ever expanding rule of law and *acquis communautaire*. We in the West have taken for granted that all accept that rules, security and stability are at the heart of any regional order. We have abolished strategy and believe that peace can now be kept on the cheap. At the same time globalisation has abolished physical space and borders which reinforces the lack of geostrategy. We are therefore shocked when somebody does not believe in those values and sees success in disorder rather than order.

"Russia is playing a weak hand strongly while we play a strong hand weakly"

"Putin is not like bad weather which will pass, he is a strategic problem to face"

"Syrian refugees were fleeing the Assad regime and not ISIS"

Main findings:

Russia:

- Lack of realistic understanding in the west of what is the Russian strategy. They see the world in geostrategic terms (zero-sum game). The main aim is to overcome the humiliation (downgrading of the empire after the fall of communism into merely a regional power) and change the current structures of the international system, which Putin is convinced works against his country. At the end the main goal is to sustain the power of the current regime in Russia (avoid a Maydan on the Red Square). Putin is no longer a partner, but a strategic competitor.
- Moscow's intention is to divide the west, weaken the US.
- Given the real Russian strategy, the "modernisation" offer from the west (which is important to modernise their economy) is not at all attractive.
- The west needs a strategy, political will, patience and unity. It also needs to think in concentric circles in terms of spheres of influence, particularly focusing on providing solid deterrence for the article 5 area, but also being realistic of what kind of security umbrella can be provided for countries beyond it.
- The west needs not only to wait for Russian action and react to it, but take the initiative itself (don't only play defence, but also offense)
- The EU needs a real foreign policy, with a strong defence component

Ukraine:

- Eradication of the cancer of corruption is the number one priority. The people of Ukraine must see and believe that their country can be well governed and honestly.

Substantial increase of salaries of state officials would be an important first step to decrease the propensity to corruption behaviour

- Only option for the "West" is to help consolidate Ukraine as a viable state and help build up its army. Ukraine wants the EU to be more robust, perhaps by reinforcing the OSCE Observer mission?
- Russia is building new military infrastructure close to the Ukrainian border to be able to project power quickly if need be in order to support their proxies in Donbas.
- The unity of the west *vis-a-vis* the undeclared war Russian war in Ukraine and adoption of sanctions was a big surprise for Moscow. Particularly the strong position of Germany. In terms of Russian mentality in international relations, "giving up part of potential profit for the defence of values" is incomprehensible.
- The price tag for Russian adventurism in Ukraine needs to be increased. This means sustaining and increasing sanctions. Sale of arms should also be considered but by individual member states.
- Sanctions can be sustained in the long-run only if they are part of a wider European strategy. There is pressure coming from industrial circles in various Member States in order to allow them to get back to business with Russia. The last deal on North-Stream 2 is a bad omen.

Russia in Syria:

- First time since the fall of communism Russia is projecting power far beyond its borders. A signal of strategic importance to the west ("we are back in the game")
- The aim is to set up an enclave in Syria which will allow the Assad regime to survive
- Reestablishment of Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean
- Their presence will only aggravate the conflict, in a region which is imploding
- Regional powers will not stand and watch how Russia is elbowing its position in their own backyard