**„Unnecessary when possible, impossible when necessary”**

**Or**

**When [Not] the Guns Fell Silent**

We have been going around in circles as far as European arms control is concerned for at least a decade. While we were discussing how to revive arms control in Europe the situation has been deteriorating further. It did in the sense that the Russian Federation has suspended the application of the CFE Treaty of 1990, the CSBM package modernization efforts were taken hostage by protracted conflicts on the fringes of Europe and the project-based arms control initiatives though agreed upon were not good enough to give recognition and profile to arms control.

There are the two regularly asked philopsophical questions with us from Russia: 1. Who is to blame? (Kto vinovat?), and 2. What to do? (Chto delat’?). Even though it is not me but my government that wants to join Russian inventions lately, let me make an attempt and respond these two questions and organize my paper around them.

**Who is to blame? (Kto vinovat?)** Even though I do not think a wishy-washy answer would help, I am afraid it would be difficult to come up with anything better. The reasons why we have no new arms control arrangements agreed, which would symbolically demonstrate that arms control is not dead in Europe are manifold and present themselves on different levels. Let me offer you a list of the main reasons:

*- Structural reasons:* 1. Arms control can flourish when the main threats, risks and challenges are associated with states. The arms control community in Europe has been extremely weak to come up with innovative ideas to address security problems generated by non-state actors. The situation is somewhat different globally where the non-state actors are brought under the aegis of the anti-personnel landmine regime. Indeed, it would not make sense to go in this direction in Europe as most states are adequately taking care of their own security problems vis-a-vis non-state actors. 2. The Cold War era, of which a large part between 1963 and 1990 was also the era of arms control, was characterized by two important features: 2.1. The destruction capability was at its peak. Mankind could be easily exterminated by the weapons at hand. 2.2. There was a relative balance between the main adversaries. The Soviet Union, in addition to the non-competitive economic system, was ruining itself by the arms race and thus at that price could compete with the U.S. militarily. Neither of them hold now.

*- Conceptual reasons:* The military factor in international relations declined in Europe and arms control (or the rest of it), according to the memorable *bon mot* of Lawrence Freedman, could be carried out by finance ministers as the best arms controllers. Military rivalry among states with large defence capacity was unimagineable. What we were left with was smaller contingencies. Either they could be addressed by post-conflict arms control as part of an imposed peace arrangement, in the former Yugoslav area or they were fundamentally asymmetrical where arms control was usually helpless, like in the case of conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation. In neither case arms control could be helpful. Namely, other conflicts did not mature into a phase when the guns could fall silent and could give way to some type of arms control arrangement. Nearly two decades have passed since we were speculating how arms control could contribute to the resolution of the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We are just as far from the resolution of the conflict as we were twenty years ago.

*- State interests:* 1. The United States remained on their own as an unchallenged military power. They did not find arms control necessary as a relevant tool of their contribution to European security any longer. However, their thinking was narrowed to agreeing upon new arrangements, first and foremost treaties. In that narrow sense they could well be right. They have ignored arms control as a communication channel, a classical function of arms control in the Cold War era. They have also satisfied themselves by the other non-dedicated channels established, like the one established under the NATO – Russia Founding Act (later the NATO – Russia Council) and the dedicated implementation bodies established by treaties concluded earlier (e.g. the Joint Consultative Group (JCG) or the Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC)). Moreover, the administration of George W. Bush integrated a large group of legal nihilists from John Bolton to Paul Wolfowitz who left no doubt about their mistrust in arms control, including taking commitments and honoring them (obviously always by other parties). 2. The Russian Federation got a bit of arms control in the 1990s and has been insistent upon it thereafter. Not for the sake of controlling arms though. The Russian Federation wanted to retain a channel of communication with other states, first and foremost with fellow great powers. This was an adequate reflection of the need for one more status provider in Moscow. Certainly, this was the right choice, as in military matters the Russian Federation had a status and hence she could have claimed to be one of the decisive players of any meeting dedicated to arms control. The Russian Federation wanted the continuation of arms control as a symbol of her great power status. Hence, she could not be satisfied by project-based low visibility arms control (sort of rules of the road, best practices, etc.) 3. A large part of Europe did not want to deal with arms control as they had not had inter-state security issues that could be affected. That’s how we have arrived at a situation that the balance between different dimensions of the activity of the OSCE that was by and large „hosting” arms control in Europe gave way to disbalance and the politico-military dimension was identified to be in decline. (I do not intend to dwell upon the matter that this was a narrow and arbitrary interpretation of the politico-military dimension.)

If we come to the conclusion as far as „who to blame” the gold medal will certainly go to … the U.S. A state that had massive military superiority could have concluded that it may well worth have the arms control circus running, provide a forum to the Russian Federation even if no arrangement could be achieved but „talk, talk, talk”. Russia was deprived of it and has turned against the system repeatedly. What we have got instead under U.S. leadership was the following: 1. Arms control gave way to non-proliferation, first and foremost of weapons of mass destruction. This was complemented by the control of arms that kill and cause massive human suffering, like the banning of landmines, cluster munitions, some arrangements on small arms and light weapons. Altough the U.S. are often not part of these arrangements formally, they have associated themselves with many of the commitments. (It is suffice to mention U.S. readiness to give up on landmines except in the context of the defence of the Republic of Korea.) These arrangements are extremely important but they are global by nature. 2. From the constructive attitude of the Obama-administration (it would have been a miracle to be even less constructive than the George W. Bush administration was) the world has benefited in the area of nuclear arms control. However, the U.S. multilateral activism symbolized by the three nuclear summits did not result in spill-over to other areas. From nuclear arms control what followed was even more nuclear arms control. Now the Russian Federation even turns against that part of the arms control agenda and is reluctant to participate in the preparation of the 4th multilateral arms control summit. We are speaking about the state that has the largest nuclear weapons arsenal on earth. 3. European arms control was invisible. When it was visible it was more about structural arms control measures (limitations and reductions) than operation arms control, the soft underbelly of arms control: confidence-building. We have all remained hostage of a cold warish approach to arms control rather than taking a fresh look of our defence and hence arms control needs. We returned to nuclear arms control and contemplate the future of a moribund structural arms control arrangement, the CFE regime.

The Russian Federation has a massive problem with her status hierarchical position. It is not ready to accept a position that it is entitled to have in a world where it is not the number of nuclear weapons or cubic meters of gas that provides status. It is a far more complex power base with major importance attributed to soft power, including a way of life that can serve as an example, lead in technological innovation, consistent public diplomacy, and others. Hence, the Russian Federation sees herself as a natural great power, a pole of a multipolar order or as the foreign policy doctrine of 2013 says: A centre of a polycentric international system. The perceived humiliation, the longing for a long-lost status could be bridged in two ways: 1. Lowering the expectation to the level of reality. 2. Delivering so that the status would be upgraded and would match the expectation. Russia, has chosen the latter and makes an effort that the world at large would recognize that Russia’s interest cannot be ignored. However, she does not do it by technological innovation, constructive international role (although in some global processes it has been constructive from Libya to North Korea and in cooperation concerning counter-terrorism in the Middle East), and persistent public diplomacy. She does it by returning to her long held strength: It is becoming a trouble-maker, relying on the use of military force in conflicts, threatens her partners with cold winter, uses camouflaged support to groups that undermine the territorial integrity of a neighbouring country, tries to keep a few corrupt countries on her orbit from Serbia to Hungary, etc.

The temptation is huge. If the soft voice of Russia in the four first years of her independent post-Cold War existence was not listened, now Moscow uses a different voice. This brings popularity with an electorate that may also miss the once mighty power of the Soviet Union. However, what we see in front of our eyes is a tragedy for the friends of Russia and may well be even more for the Russian people. On the 4th of November, the day of Russian national unity, speakers from Zhirinovsky to Zhuganov at political rallies left no doubt that they rejoice the world „fears” Russia. Even though this is not true as the West sleeps well while Russian military planes patrol the skies of Europe from the North Sea to the Atlantic coast, it is presentable to the Russian public. Whether this new-old status of greatness can be achieved without bankrupting the Russian Federation is open to doubt. The Soviet Union chose to be powerful rather than rich and then she lost everything. She ended up in bankruptcy, dependent upon western credits, aid, grain and technology and thus nobody believed any longer she was so mighty. Will now the Russian Federation repeat the tragic and frightening example?

**What to do? (Chto delat’?)** The Russian Federation has demonstrated, the military component of security cannot be taken for granted in Europe. Hence, one condition of arms control in Europe is provided. Arms control may have some relevance as military security is back on the European agenda.

Other papers presented at this conference contemplate where arms control should go. It is clear, it is only the helplessness that continues. Arms control is neither necessary, nor possible. Do we need the CFE process back? Certainly not. Do we need more transparency in the interstate context? No. Do we need further undifferentiated confidence-building measures for Europe as a whole? No, we don’t.

There is a far more difficult problem for arms control than to find the adequate form or framework. It is that the time is not appropriate. As long as the geostrategic rivalry continues for determining the orientation of Ukraine, adding increasingly clearly to the protracted conflicts as far as her south-east, it will not be possible to return to negotiating tables that we all left long ago.

Furthermore, if one, two or three protracted conflicts killed anything that even resembled of arms control in the OSCE context (think of the draft conflict management document in Astana or the Lithuanian chairmanship’s effort that lead to the so-called Vilnius CSBM package, much reduced though compared to the original aspiration), adding further ones will not make the situation easier. We know that the Ukraine crisis will not go away. We have to be prepared for a lasting conflict between the Russian Federation and the enlarged West. The areas of Donetsk and Lugansk will closely resemble of the northern part of Kosovo (north of Mitrovica). It will be a legal part of Ukraine and de facto connected to Moscow ranging from the currency used locally to the export of goods and the import of electricity. Contrary to other cases where Russia was an „indirect” actor, here Moscow is an unhidden challenger of the regime. There is good news: We will have ample time to contemplate arms control in Europe.

What we need while we think is a far more effective conflict management system that finds adequate compromise to guarantee all-European cooperation. Cooperation that is not subjected to the conflicts on the periphery (even though not peripheral). We need measures, which help „humanize” these conflicts as the Swiss chairmanship recommended. Help avoid sharp divisions between communities, citizens and severe the infrastructural links.

If we want to retain arms control in Europe we will have to stretch it to the limit. In the end it is not going to be arms control but far more conflict mitigation, reconciliation. If arms control will have a chance to make a contribution then it will be at the soft end of arms control and in the area of implementation of existing commitments. The areas that we continue to ignore while we are seized with matters, which have either lost their importance or are irrelevant for Europe.

Arms control in Europe has become the least relevant, slowest and most cumbersome way to address security problems in Europe. This fact notwithstanding, it may be worthwhile to think about arms control under the new conditions, have some exchanges about it among experts civil servants to have some ammunition in our pocket when the time is ripe.

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