Russia and NATO: between Competition and Cooperation. From the End of the Cold War to the Pratica di mare agreement (1991-2002)

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Abstract:
In the light of newly arisen tensions between NATO and Russia, this article attempts to look at the development of NATO-Russia relations in a broad historical perspective. Drawing on declassified diplomatic documentation from Soviet/Russian and US archives as well as on most recent literature, it deals in particular with Russia's vision and pursuit of a revisited European security system in the years following the end of the Cold War. In doing so, it also examines the different strategies followed by Russia's leadership with respect to the problem of NATO's transformation and enlargement after the Cold War.

Keywords:
NATO, Russia, NATO Enlargement, European Security System, post-Cold War Era

1. *Historical Premises: the German Reunification*

The present-day tension between Russia and NATO in the context of the Ukrainian-Crimean crisis is the result of a confrontation that has been in progress for over a decade. The question of whether the United States pledged in 1990 that NATO would not expand eastward in return for the Soviet Union's consent to German reunification has been the subject of a lively debate[1]. However, whilst based on historical sources, this debate seems to revolve around a contentious dispute driven by current events. In reflecting on the reasons behind the ongoing standoff, it might therefore be useful to consider NATO-Russia relations in a broader historical perspective as well as to give due attention to Russia's vision and pursuit of a revisited European security system, drawing on US and Soviet/Russian diplomatic documents on the end of the Cold War[2].

1 Among the many, see M. Kramer, *The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia*, in "Washington Quarterly", n. 2, 2009, pp. 39-61; M.E. Sarotte, *A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow about NATO Expansion*, in "Foreign Affairs", n. 5, 2014, pp. 90-97; J. Shifrinson, *Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion*, in "International Security", n. 4, 2016, pp. 7-44.

2 While the volumes on the Bush and Clinton Administration of the series *Foreign Relations of the United States* are under preparation, the National Security Archive (NSA) has digitalised a collection of US and Soviet/Russian declassified documents from the beginning of the Cold War up to the present time. The collection includes archival materials from the Bush and Clinton Presidential

As is well known, the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 had reopened the German question, challenging the arrangements established at the end of the Second World War[3]. At the time, despite the still evolving changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Iron Curtain had not yet collapsed, and the conflicting commitments of West and East Germany to the two blocs presented itself as a serious problem that needed to be solved. The balance of power in Europe and the interests of both the Soviet Union and the United States in maintaining their influence on the continent were at stake[4]. This was of particular importance for the USSR, given the difficulties that Mikhail Gorbachev's reform programme was facing within the country, forcing the Soviet leader to reach out to Western governments for political and financial support[5].

As in the past, the main task for the Soviet Union was to prevent the creation of a unified Germany fully integrated in the Western bloc, particularly in its military alliance. Such a shift in Europe's political balance would in fact have marked the decline of the USSR, jeopardising its strategic and security interests. By introducing the *New Thinking* Gorbachev sought to overcome the Cold War scheme proposing the idea of a non-divisive, interrelated world in which each state would implement its own foreign policy in a way that would be non-threatening towards others. To this end, he included in his foreign policy agenda the quest for an agreement on disarmament measures and the withdrawal of the military contingent from European territories, insisting instead on the need to strengthen the role of global institutions[6]. While on the German issue US diplo-

Libraries, some of which are mentioned in this paper. See also the series *Vneshnyaya politika Rossii: sbornik dokumentov* (VPR), Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenya, Moskva, which portrays the activity of Russia's diplomacy through the publication of official documents; T.A. Shakleina (ed.), *Foreign Policy and National Security of Contemporary Russia (1991-2002)*, tom 4, MGIMO, Moskva 2002; R. Kupiecki, M. Menkiszak (eds.), *Documents Talks. NATO-Russia Relations after the Cold War*, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warszawa 2020.

3 H. Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Nomos, Baden-Baden 1998; A. Galkin, A. Chernyaev, *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros*, Ves' mir, Moskva 2006; F. Bozo (ed.), *German Reunification: A Multinational History,* Routledge, London 2017.

4 On the post-Cold War European security order, R.L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition. American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*, Brookings Institution, Washington 1994; M.E. Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2009; S. Savranskaya et al., *Masterpieces of History. The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe*, CEU, Budapest 2010; W.H. Hill, *No Place for Russia. European Security Institutions since 1989*, Columbia University Press, New York 2018; A. Brown, *The Human Factor: Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher and the End of the Cold War,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2020; M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch. America, Russia, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Stalemate*, Yale University Press, New Heaven 2021.

5 M. Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, Doubleday, New York 1996; Id., *Zhizn' i reformy*, Novosti, Moskva 2005. Cf. E. Shevardnadze, *Moy vybor v zashitu demokratii i svobody*, Novosti, Moskva 1991; A. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, Penn State University Press, University Park 2000; A. Yakovlev, *Perestroika: nadezhdy i real'nosti*, Novosti, Moskva 1991; Id., *Omut pamyati*, Vagrius, Moskva 2000; V. Falin, *Bez skidok na obstoyatel'stva. Politicheskie vospominaniya*, Sovremennik, Moskva 1999.

6 A. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy. Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Rowman & Littlefield, Washington 2013, pp. 37 ff.; M-P. Rey, *Gorbachev's New Thinking and Europe, 1985-*

macy kept working to convince Gorbachev to accept Germany's reunification within the NATO structure, the Soviets advocated for the replacement of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact with a neutral, pan-European security system. In their minds, such a system had its roots in the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the only pan-European framework developed during the Cold War in which the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies were included as full and equal participants alongside the US and its NATO allies[7]. When on October 31, 1989, Gorbachev's adviser, Aleksander Yakovlev, was asked to share his impressions about the changes taking place in Eastern Europe, he explained that one of the Soviet Union's main concerns was to avoid having hostile nations at its borders or, on the German territories "in the heart of Europe", countries that were increasing their armaments. Significantly, though, he noted that if an agreement to disband political and military unions were to be reached it would have been "a different matter"[8].

According to many, in dealing with the German question Gorbachev went too far with concessions, relying on Western leaders' vague promises to the effect that Soviet interests would have been taken into account and that no harm to Soviet security was planned[9]. As is known, the turning point came with the Gorbachev-Baker talks that took place in Moscow on February 7-9, 1990[10]. On this occasion, the US Secretary of State explicitly introduced for the first time the possibility of trading off Soviet concessions with the reunification of Germany and its NATO membership against guarantees that NATO's military presence would not spread eastward. Baker first met the Soviet Foreign Affairs minister Eduard Shevardnadze, to whom he spoke about the importance "that [German unification] proceeds in stability and with due regard for the security concerns of Germany's neighbours". Bypassing the Soviet proposal on a CSCE-led process, Baker pleaded for NATO's full membership of the soon-to-be unified Germany, reducing the role of the CSCE to that of "an umbrella organization", which would simply ratify the results of the unification process. It is important to note that Baker spoke of a "changed NATO" that would be "far less of a military

1989 in F. Bozo (ed.), *Europe and the End of the Cold War: a Reappraisal*, Routledge, London 2008, pp. 23-35. Cf. M. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, Harper Collins, New York 1987*; Gorbachevskie chtenia. Otvechaya na vyzov vremeni: vneshnjaja politika Perestrojki*, Gorbachev-Fond, Moskva 2011, n. 8; E. Shevardnadze, *Vneshnyaya politika i perestroika*, Novosti, Moskva 1990; Id., *Kogda rukhnul zheleznyy zanaves: vstrechi i vospominaniya*, Evropa, Moskva 2009.

7 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991. From Cold War through Cold Peace to Partnership*, Routledge, London 2006, p. 8.

8 Record of Conversation between A. Yakovlev and Z. Brzezinski, Oct. 31, 1989 in *Masterpieces of History*, cit., pp. 563-568.

9 A review of the retrospective observations on Gorbachev's policies is in V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2009, pp. 302 ff.

10 Cf. J. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992*, Putnam's sons, New York 1995, pp. 202-206; E. Shevardnadze, *Moy vybor*, cit., pp. 132-133, 172-190.

organization, and much more of a political one". He went further, adding that there would be "iron-clad guarantees that NATO's jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward". However, Baker also made sure to explain what NATO presence meant for Europe, underlying that Eastern and Western European countries saw the presence of US forces through NATO troops as a "force of stability"[11]. Later that day, he also personally informed Gorbachev that the US and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) did not view a neutral Germany favourably[12]. Both American and Soviet records of the conversation confirm that Baker openly asked Gorbachev whether he preferred "a united Germany outside of NATO, absolutely independent and without American troops; or a united Germany keeping its connections with NATO, but with the guarantee that NATO's jurisdiction or troops will not spread East of the present boundary"[13].

According to the Americans' account of the meeting, Gorbachev found the approach outlined by Baker "a very possible one", specifying that the Soviets saw Germany's containment within a European framework as the best way to avoid a new Versailles. In the Soviet account, though, Gorbachev also pointed out that "a broadening of the NATO zone [was] not acceptable", although he conceded that "the presence of American troops [could] play a containing role"[14]. After hearing from the US deputy national security adviser what Baker had said to Gorbachev, the KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov sounded categorical in arguing that the USSR had "no enthusiasm" about a united Germany within NATO and that other options had to be sought[15]. However, Baker had drawn a different conclusion from his meeting with Gorbachev: he informed the FRG chancellor Helmuth Kohl, who was about to fly to Moscow, that the Soviet leader would agree on a unified Germany tied to NATO in exchange for assurances that NATO would not expand itself further[16].

Actually, Baker's suggestion had upset the US National Security Council, whose staff felt that no concessions should be made to the Soviets about any limit to the possibility of NATO shifting eastward. While Baker was invited to revise his phrasing, President George Bush made it clear to Kohl that the US only endorsed a "special military status" for the territory of East Germany (GDR) within the alliance. Howev-

11 Memorandum of conversation between J. Baker and E. Shevardnadze in Moscow, Feb. 9, 1990, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325678-Document-04-Memorandum-of-conversation-between.

12 Memorandum of conversation between M. Gorbachev and J. Baker in Moscow, Feb. 9, 1990, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325679-Document-05-Memorandum-of-conversation-between.

13 Record of conversation between M. Gorbachev and J. Baker in Moscow (Excerpts), Feb. 9, 1990, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325680-Document-06-Record-of-conversation-between.

14 *Ibid*.

15 Memorandum of conversation between R. Gates and V. Kryuchkov in Moscow, Feb, 9, 1990, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325681-Document-07-Memorandum-of-conversation-between.

16 Letter from J. Baker to H. Kohl, Feb. 10, 1990, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325682-Document-08-Letter-from-James-Baker-to-Helmut-Kohl.

er, eager to gain Gorbachev's approval of German reunification, in his talks with the Soviet leader Kohl opted for a more pleasing choice of words, namely Baker's one[17].

It is indeed on those premises that the next day Gorbachev would have given his consent in principle to Kohl, although within the Soviet establishment there were different stands on the matter. The diary of Shevardnadze's aide suggests that the Foreign Affairs minister thought Gorbachev had accepted the deal about keeping Germany in NATO "too hastily"[18]. Similarly, in April the Politburo's instructions for Shevardnadze's visit to Washington stated that the USSR "[could not] agree" to the inclusion of a unified Germany within NATO and the month later the same possibility was considered "unacceptable – politically and psychologically"[19]. An effective summary of what would later become a common view in Russian political circles on the question of NATO expansion can be found in a *memorandum* that Valentin Falin, one of the major Central Committee's experts on Germany, wrote to Gorbachev in April[20]. Falin warned that the US and the FRG, with the acquiescence of Britain and France, were "persistently and purposefully" trying to solve the question of German unification on their own with the aim to present the USSR with a *fait accompli*. Falin also indicated the "intensive cultivation of not only NATO members but also [Soviet Union's] Warsaw Pact allies" as "an essential feature" of Western strategy. He thought that the West was "outplaying" the Soviet Union, "promising to respect [its] interests, but in practice, step by step, separating [it] from 'traditional Europe'". Falin concluded that the idea of a common European home was "turning into a mirage", while "the apologists of the Cold War" were instead regrouping forces, showing a "stubborn unwillingness to accept equal standards"[21].

Despite such warnings, on July 16, 1990 Gorbachev confirmed to Kohl his consent to reunify Germany entering into NATO[22]. In exchange, along with a line of credit from the FRG, he demanded assurances on the non-proliferation of NATO facilities in GDR territory and an official agreement on leaving the Soviet troops in East Germany for the duration of the transitional period. However, Gorbachev also reminded Kohl that in his view "the pledge of NATO non-expansion to the territory of the GDR in spirit means that NATO would not take advantage of the Soviet willingness to compromise on Germany"[23]. In this respect, the next day Bush made a

17 M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., pp. 55-58. Cf. J. Shifrinson, *Eastbound and Down: The United States, NATO Enlargement, and Suppressing the Soviet and Western European Alternatives, 1990–1992,* in "Journal of Strategic Studies", n. 6-7, 2020, pp. 816-846.

18 T. Stepanov-Mamaladze's diary, Feb. 12, 1990. NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325685-Document-10-02-Teimuraz-Stepanov-Mamaladze-diary.

19 R. Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, cit., pp. 417, 613-615.

20 On Falin's stance on the issue, H. Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch*, cit., pp. 342-346; M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., *passim*.

21 V. Falin's Memorandum to M. Gorbachev (Excerpts), Apr. 18, 1990 in *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros*, cit., pp. 398-408.

22 H. Adomeit, *Gorbachev's Consent to United Germany's Membership of NATO* in *Europe and the end of the Cold War*, cit., pp. 107-117; M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., ch. 3.

23 Record of Conversation between M. Gorbachev and H. Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts), July 15,

telephone call to Gorbachev, listing all actions and decisions taken by Western countries in order to provide the USSR with the security guarantees it asked for. Together with assurances on the future size of the German forces, he mentioned the idea of supporting an expanded and stronger CSCE, "in which the USSR can share and be part of the new Europe". Moreover, he reminded Gorbachev of the willingness to open NATO to regular diplomatic contact with the Soviet government, as officially stated by the Allied countries at the NATO summit held on July 17 in London[24].

Despite the critical opinions that emerged over the years, at the time Gorbachev and his advisers felt they had no choice but to take the deal. Right after the Gorbachev-Kohl meeting, Anatoly Chernyayev, one of Gorbachev's foreign affairs advisers, wrote in his diary, "It is pointless to resist here" since "it would go against the current of events"[25]. As it seems, the NATO summit played a decisive role. According to Shevardnadze's account, Gorbachev and his staff waited for its outcome with great expectation. The conciliatory attitude and the announcement that NATO would no longer consider the USSR as an enemy were welcomed as the assurance the Soviets needed to change their position on the German issue[26]. In retrospect, others concluded that such a deal was not good enough, mainly because of the lack of any written agreement with the West. This made it possible for Germany to become part of NATO leaving the USSR without any commitments about the future structure of European security or any firm guarantees against NATO expansion to the East[27]. Incidentally, though, one may note that while it is true that the Soviet *nomenklatura* was not unanimous, no one among Gorbachev's advisers or among his opponents, not even those who more or less openly distrusted the attitude of the Western leadership, explicitly recommended asking the other party to set out a written arrangement on NATO non-expansion[28].

2. *The Partnership for Peace Programme*

As the Soviet Union collapsed on December 25, 1991, Boris Yeltsin took the reins as the first elected president of the newly independent Russian Federa-

1990 in *Mikhail Gorbachev i germanskii vopros*, cit., pp. 495-504.

24 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between M. Gorbachev and G. Bush, July 17, 1990. NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325701-Document-24-Memorandum-of-Telephone-Conversation; *London Declaration*, https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c900706a.htm.

25 *Dnevnik Chernyaeva*, 1990 g., pp. 31-32. See, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/Chernyaev.html.

26 E. Shevardnadze, *Moy vybor*, cit., pp. 240-244.

27 V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, cit., pp. 327-330; E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads. Toward the New Millennium*, Yale University Press, New Heaven 2004, p. 130.

28 In his memoirs Yakovlev claims to have been wary of Bush and not to have trusted any of the words the US President gave him and Gorbachev, see *Omut pamjati*, cit., pp. 528-529. In his already mentioned *memorandum*, Falin had more generally suggested to seek out a "reliable legal protection" of Soviet interests by means of a binding settlement that could combine the German unification with the pan-European process.

tion[29]. He and the new Russian establishment have been described as "Westernist liberals" convinced as much as Francis Fukuyama that history had ended[30]. Therefore, they advocated Russia's transition to a market-oriented economy and a multiparty political system, at the same time working to obtain a full and rapid membership in all international organisations, which would, in their mind, eventually gain Russia a more balanced and strategic partnership with Western countries. With regard to foreign policy, though, Yeltsin and Foreign Affairs minister Andrey Kozyrev, a former "new thinker" who had long served in the Directorate of International Organisations of the Soviet Foreign Ministry[31], partially continued in Gorbachev's footsteps. Firstly, they supported CSCE's institutional role and activities, ruling in favour of setting up a mechanism for CSCE peacekeeping operations and of deploying mediation to resolve the conflicts undergoing in sensitive areas for Russia, such as Georgia, Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh[32].

Secondly, in the beginning they maintained a positive and trustful attitude towards NATO policy, expecting the Western countries to comply with their promise to engage Russia on the Alliance's political agenda. It ought to be remembered that in February 1991 the Warsaw Pact countries decided to disband their alliance. Effective by July, the dissolution of the organisation not only put an end to Moscow's political influence and military control in Eastern and Central Europe, but also entailed a political reorientation of those countries in a world no longer divided into two political and military blocs[33]. This may explain why in December Yeltsin addressed NATO members declaring Russia's intention to join the Alliance[34]. This move appeared aimed at ensuring that Russia would be invited to participate in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, a forum established as a way of implementing the London Declaration through seeking dialogue and cooperation with the former members of the Warsaw Pact as well as of the USSR. However, in doing so Moscow wished for a special relationship with NATO, which would recognise Russia's status as a great power, equal to the other Western countries in dealing with international and particularly Euro-Atlantic affairs[35].

NATO's Brussels summit held in January 1994, though, brought disappointment to the Russian government. In the final summit declaration, the Allied coun-

29 See Yeltsin's autobiographies, *Against the Grain: An Autobiography*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1990; *The Struggle for Russia*, Times Books, New York 1994; *Midnight Diaries*, Public Affairs, New York 2000. For biographies of Yeltsin, J. Morris, *Boris Yeltsin: From Bolshevik to Democrat*, Dutton, New York 1991; V. Solovev, E. Klepikova, *Boris Yeltsin: A Political Biography*, Weidenfiled & Nicolson, London 1992; L. Aron, *Boris Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life*, Harper Collins, London 2000; T. Colton, *Yeltsin: A Life*, Basic Books, New York 2008.

30 A. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, cit., p. 60.

31 A. Kozyrev, *The Firebird: The Elusive Fate of Russian Democracy*, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh 2019.

32 https://www.osce.org/mc/29121.

33 On the evolution of US/Western-Soviet strategic relationship and the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact, R. Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, cit., chs. 12-13.

34 M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., p. 133.

35 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO*, cit., pp. 51-52, 56; M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., pp. 125-128.

tries renewed their support for Russian political, constitutional and economic reforms, but limited it to only mentioning their intention to develop a cooperation with Russia "as with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe", thus denying Russia the privileged position it requested[36]. Moreover, in the same document NATO members reaffirmed that the Alliance remained "open to the membership of other European countries", announcing the launch of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative, presented as an invitation to future state partners to join NATO "in new political and military efforts to work alongside the Alliance"[37].

It has been argued that, if read in the light of the Brussels declaration, in Russia's eyes the PfP programme came across as a "covert route to eventual NATO enlargement"[38]. Apparently, such an idea would have been compatible with the plans of the Clinton administration, as shown by a *memorandum* addressed to the secretary of State, Warren Christopher. The paper set out a *Strategy for NATO's expansion and transformation,* along with a specific calendar for its enlargement, and was drafted in early September 1993 by the undersecretary of State for International Security Affairs, Lynn Davis, and Stephen Flanagan, the associate director of the Policy Planning Staff at the Department of State, both among those who were also working on the PfP programme[39]. As put by Madeleine Albright, Christopher's successor as secretary of State, President Bill Clinton and his staff used the PfP to establish a linkage between NATO and the new European democracies[40]. The plan was to offer Central and Eastern European countries a form of affiliation with NATO in the short term, leaving open the option to obtain a full membership in the future[41].

In this scheme, NATO's main challenge was that of containing Russia in a non-confrontational way, possibly through its integration in the Trans-Atlantic community. For the time being, though, Russian government did not lose sight of its traditional concerns. In mid-September, Yeltsin expressed his "uneasiness" over discussion on NATO "quantitative expansion", suggesting as an alternative approach one that would "lead to a truly pan-European security system" based on collective actions rather than bloc membership. Additionally, he recalled that in Russia's view "the spirit of the treaty on German unification precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone further East"[42]. In order to reassure the Russians, Christopher made a quick trip to Moscow at the end of October. Having explained that there was no intention to isolate Russia, he introduced PfP

36 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24470.htm?mode=pressrelease
37 On the debate on NATO enlargement within the Clinton administration, M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., pp. 141 ff.
38 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO*, cit., p. 59.
39 Strategy for NATO's expansion and transformation, Sept. 7, 1993, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4390816-Document-02-Strategy-for-NATO-s-Expansion-and.
40 M. Albright, *Madam Secretary. A Memoir*, MacMillan, London 2003, p. 252.
41 M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., pp. 173 ff.
42 Retranslation of Yeltsin letter on NATO expansion, Sept. 15, 1993, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4390818-Document-04-Retranslation-of-Yeltsin-letter-on.

initiative to the Russian President, describing it as a formula designed to include all NATO and Central and Eastern European countries, as well as the newly independent states of the former USSR. Yeltsin for his part asked confirmation that all states would be "on equal footing and there would be a partnership and not a membership". Having received an affirmative answer, he enthusiastically declared that the initiative was "a brilliant idea"[43].

Such a good disposition on Russia's part was based on the hope that the PfP would have replaced NATO enlargement. Russian military doctrine, made public in November 1993, still considered the growth of military alliances as one of the "existing and potential sources of military danger" to Russia[44]. On the same page was the official statement released by the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry after Clinton's first visit to Russia in January. According to the Russian statement, the PfP programme had "a positive potential" and could help prevent the creation of "new dividing lines in Europe". Even so, Russia regarded the partnership as "an important, but not the only element in the emerging architecture of security and stability in Europe". Besides, the Russian government stressed it would have been premature to set out discussions on specific parameters for NATO enlargement, since it was something that Russia would consider only "as a part of a general transformation of the existing European security structures, not least of NATO itself"[45].

In fact, the State Duma expressed misgivings about the idea of Russia joining the PfP. In particular, the State Duma Committee on Defence was of the opinion that the programme did not comply with Russian stance on the need to adopt qualitative rather than quantitative solutions to European security issues. More to that, the Committee pointed out that Russia had not participated in the definition of the PfP framework[46]. Despite domestic scepticism, the Russian government opted to sign the PfP Framework Document on June 22, 1994, fearing that staying outside the programme would oust the country from the European community[47]. It is revealing, though, that Russia decided to join the PfP also with the hope of influencing NATO policy[48]. Finally, Moscow accepted the programme only after obtaining some concessions, i.e. the formula "no vetoes, no surprises" and the promise that the Russia-NATO relationship would also develop in areas "outside PfP"[49]. A first sign of the special status recognised to Russia was the setting up of the Contact Group, an informal forum in which Russia took part alongside the US, the UK, Ger-

43 Secretary Christopher's meeting with President Yeltsin in Moscow, Oct. 22, 1993, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4390822-Document-08-Secretary-Christopher-s-meeting-with. Cf. M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., p. 178.

44 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO*, cit., p. 50.

45 *Soobshchenije o vizite prezidenta SSHA B. Klintona v Rossiju,* 12 janvarja 1994 g., VPR, 1994, 1, D. 2.

46 Gosudarstvennaya Duma (GD), Stenogramma zasedanija (SZ) 14 marta 1994 g.

47 GD, SZ 25 marta 1994 g.

48 *Ibid*.

49 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO*, cit., p. 60.

many, France and, later, Italy to discuss all issues pertaining the on-going conflict in Yugoslavia. This was of particular relevance after the crisis generated in April by NATO's decision to use its airpower against Yugoslavia with no prior consultation with Russia, which was at the time also engaged in direct negotiations with the Bosnian Serbs.

After NATO's Brussels meeting in December a new setback in relations suspended Russia's accession to the PfP. The summit's final communiqué did not meet Russia's expectations, as it addressed that "active participation in the Partnership for Peace will also play an important role in the evolutionary process of the expansion of NATO". In the statement the Alliance welcomed NATO enlargement, wishing it "would reach to democratic states to our East", as part of a process that would take into account "political and security developments in the whole of Europe". More importantly, they announced the decision "to initiate a process of examination inside the Alliance to determine how NATO will enlarge, the principle to guide this process and the implications of membership"[50]. The document specified that it was considered premature to discuss the timeframe for the enlargement or which countries to invite to join the Alliance; nonetheless, Russia could not approve such a move, all the more so since it had not been consulted on this plan, contrary to what the formula "no vetoes, no surprises" suggested[51].

Yeltsin decided to get a clearer understanding on the subject in his one-on-one meeting with Clinton on May 10, 1995. The Russian President explained that Russia could not accept the NATO bloc continuing to exist and to expand towards Russia's borders while the Warsaw Pact had been abolished. He saw in this situation "nothing but humiliation for Russia" and a "new form of encirclement" that Russian people would not tolerate. While Russia might have agreed on the matter of the European security architecture mentioned in the NATO communiqué, on the other hand it still imagined that architecture as "one European space" in a world without blocs[52]. A month later, meeting Clinton in Canada, Yeltsin went back to talk about OSCE, the former CSCE, "as the principal mechanism to build new security order in Europe", hoping that in its turn NATO would evolve into a political organisation[53]. However, the Russian alternative did not appear solid enough. For the time being Yeltsin only suggested postponing NATO expansion until 1999 or 2000[54], since his main concern lay in the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, in the light

50 https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c941201a.htm.

51 Yeltsin-Clinton Letter, Dec. 6, 1994, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4950562-Document-03-Official-Informal-No-248-Yeltsin.

52 Summary Report on One-on-One meeting between President Clinton and Yeltsin at the Kremlin, May 10, 1995, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4390833-Document-19-Summary-report-on-One-on-One-meeting.

53 Clinton-Yeltsin Meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 17, 1995, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4390834-Document-20-Clinton-Yeltsin-Meeting-June-17-1995.

54 Summary Report, cit.

of the growing domestic opposition to the Westernist policies he had advocated. As a result, Yeltsin accepted a new trade-off proposed by Clinton, who was himself under pressure from the Republican-controlled Congress[55]: if Russia had accepted NATO enlargement, which was to be decided after the Russian elections, there would have been "a role [for] Russia in PfP and a clear statement from the US that Russia should not be excluded from NATO membership". Furthermore, Clinton once again assured there would be "a special relationship between Russia and NATO" in the context of a "greater integration of Russia into other international institutions" such as the G-7[56].

3. *Primakov and Primakovism*

Despite Clinton's statements on the intention of the US to be involved in Europe in a way that would permit Russia's integration, Russian domestic opposition was very critical of such a possibility, to the point that Yeltsin had to replace Kozyrev with Evgeny Primakov in January 1996. Up to then, Primakov had been the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, an influential agency that had long argued in favour of a reassessment of Russian foreign policy priorities, questioning the idea of a "natural partnership" with the West[57]. According to Primakov, a rapprochement with the West was necessary, but it would have been wrong to pursue it "at any cost" or by "simply navigating in the wake of the United States", in a scheme that presented Russia as a mere follower and the West as the leader[58]. He envisioned instead a Russian state able to pursue its own interests through an active foreign policy[59], meaning that Russia should seek an equal partnership with every power following upon their common goals. Should their aims no longer coincide, though, Russia would not have to sacrifice its vital national interests[60].

Yet, at the heart of Primakov's agenda were the traditional pillars of Russian foreign policy, such as the creation of an effective, OSCE-centred European security system and the achievement of a special relationship with the United States.

55 On how electoral issues influenced the two Presidents' stance on NATO enlargement, M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., p. 227; S. Radchenko, *'Nothing but humiliation for Russia': Moscow and NATO's Eastern Enlargement, 1993-1995*, in "Journal of Strategic Studies", n. 6-7, 2020, pp. 769-815.

56 Summary Report, cit.

57 A. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 69-70.

58 E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads*, cit., p. 126. On Primakov, see also, Id., *Vstrechi na perekrestkakh*, TPRF, Moskva 2015; *Chelovek-Epokha. Evgeny Maksimovich Primakov*, in "International Affairs", Special edition, Oct. 2014; A. Rybakov (ed.), *The Unknown Primakov. Memoirs*, TPRF, Moskva 2016.

59 Cf. *Vstuplenije Ministra Inostrannykh del Rossijskoj Federatsii Y.M. Primakova na gorchakovskikh chtenijakh v Moskve v sviazi c 200-letijem A.M. Gorchakova,* 28 aprelja 1998 g., VPR, 1998, D. 58.

60 E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads*, cit., p. 126. Cf. the opinions expressed by the current Russian Foreign Affairs Minister, S. Lavrov, *Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective*, in "Russia in Global Affairs", n. 1, 2018.

During his meeting in Finland with the US Secretary of State in February 1996, Primakov suggested five points to govern the relations between Moscow and Washington, which included regular consultations, no surprises and finding solutions to issues in the event of Russian and American interests not match[61]. In this regard, Primakov argued that NATO's approaching of Russia's borders was creating an "extremely unfavourable" military and geopolitical situation for Moscow. Christopher, though, was unreceptive. He rebutted that at the beginning of 1993 Clinton had clearly stated that NATO would expand and that Yeltsin had only asked for the expansion to be gradual and inclusive of Russia[62]. Primakov tried to be more direct in his meeting with Christopher and Clinton in New York, where he attended the UN General Assembly in September. Calling on a more active effort to create "a new architecture of European security", Primakov underlined that Russia "has taken part in NATO structures (PfP, Council for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation) and will continue to do so hoping that they will have a positive effect on the reorganization of NATO itself". However, its participation did not mean that Russia agreed to "a NATO-centred model of European security", which should be pursued through other existing institutions, such as OSCE, "the only truly universal organisation of European states" that could provide "a means for solid cooperation between the countries of Europe and North America"[63].

Ultimately, having to choose between opposing NATO expansion in a resumption of the Cold War and letting it happen without attempting to prevent it, Primakov sensibly went for a third option, which consisted in maintaining a firm opposition to NATO enlargement, while in the meantime trying to influence it and reduce its negative consequences for Russia. This determination emerged clearly during the negotiations for the new agreement that was supposed to define Russia-NATO relations. On the first official meeting in December 1996, Primakov sent the message that "no matter how eager Russia was to turn the Big Seven into the Big Eight and to join the WTO and the Paris and London clubs […] we would not accept any payment for the softening of our position toward NATO"[64]. On January 31, 1997, on the eve of the announcement of the first NATO enlargement at the Madrid summit, Primakov addressed a *memorandum* to the speaker of the State Duma, stating that Russia's position on NATO expansion remained "invariably negative". Primakov qualified the rationale of NATO enlargement as "unconvincing" and pointed at the assurances given by Western leaders in 1990 instead, with specific reference to the alleged promise that NATO would not expand eastward. In this regard, Primakov stressed the divisive effect the expansion programme may have in Europe, questioning whether "today's Russia represents a greater threat than the Soviet Union at the time"[65].

61 E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads*, cit., p. 134.
62 Ivi, p. 135.
63 Ivi, pp. 143, 145.
64 Ivi, p. 147.
65 Y. Primakov Memo to G. Seleznev (Excerpts), NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.htm-

The final document on Russia-NATO relations presented at the Paris summit in 1997 was the result of numerous multi-level talks occurred between Moscow and Brussels from January to May[66]. However, the most influential factor for the success of the negotiations was the resumption of US-Russia contacts. In fact, all the decisive issues on which the agreement was laid had been separately discussed in three bilateral meetings held in Washington, Helsinki and Moscow. In view of the summit on arm reductions scheduled for March 21-22 in Helsinki, Primakov met Clinton and Albright in Washington on March 17. The purpose of the trip was to draft the summit documents and to find framework approaches to certain problems "that could not be put on paper", such as those concerning NATO-Russia relations[67]. In this respect, "after arduous discussions" Clinton agreed to include in the US-Russian Joint Statement on European Security a personal assurance that the number of NATO troops deployed near Russian borders would not increase, together with the acknowledgement of OSCE's special role in fostering European security. Clinton and Primakov also agreed that the joint statement would provide for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, with the US President giving his consent to incorporate this commitment in the document on NATO-Russian relations[68]. In Helsinki, besides reaffirming their commitment to the ABM Treaty, Clinton and Yeltsin settled on further reductions in strategic nuclear weapons. Regarding NATO, they agreed that nuclear weapons would not be deployed outside the borders of the Alliance's member states and that no threatening number of NATO troops would be permanently stationed close to Russia's borders[69]. This time, though, Primakov deemed that "definitive statements of these provisions and an agreement on the terms of their implementation were needed"[70]. Therefore, on May 1-2 he welcomed Albright in Moscow and presented her with the request to find a formula that would limit the growth of NATO's military potential, to which the US Secretary of State replied with a conciliatory attitude. As she recalled, the US would have put up with the Russian approach as long as Russia did not demand to have a formal say on NATO policy[71]. With this in mind, Albright accommodated her colleague's request to include in the NATO-Russia document a statement with regard to setting a limit on NATO conventional forces in the event of its expansion and on the future military infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe[72].

On May 27, 1997, the *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation* was finally signed in Paris. The two parts declared to "not consider each other as adversaries" and pledged to

l?doc=4390839-Document-25-Excerpts-from-Evgeny-Primakov-Memo.

66 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO*, cit., pp. 68-72. Cf. M. Albright, *Madam Secretary*, cit., pp. 254-257.

67 E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads*, cit., p. 148.

68 Ivi, p. 149.

69 https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997_03/js.

70 E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads*, cit., pp. 153-154.

71 M. Albright, *Madam Secretary*, cit., p. 256.

72 Ivi, 159-160.

overcome "the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition", to strengthen cooperation, and to build "a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe", reiterating their commitment to the CFE Treaty. To achieve these aims NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) was set up, a mechanism for consultations and coordination as well as for joint decision-making and joint action in relation to security issues of common concern. As agreed, NATO also stated that the Alliance "will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces"[73].

The Founding Act finally seemed to give Russia a special relationship with NATO, since the PJC consisted of something more than an informal forum. Not only did the council include Russia among its official members, but the Russian government could also establish a diplomatic mission to NATO, although its representatives were to be accredited to the Russian embassy in Brussels, and not to NATO headquarters[74]. On the other hand, though, Russia and NATO's involvement in Euro-Atlantic affairs remained asymmetric, given that, as arranged by the US National Security Council[75], the joint decision-making provided in the Founding Act was not matched by a veto right. As a matter of fact, Albright considered Russia-NATO charter a success on the part of the US diplomacy, who had eventually "worn the Russians down", forcing them to compromise on the one thing the US were not willing to concede on[76].

Not surprisingly, after the signing of the Founding Act in their position Russia and NATO seemed to be not far from where they had started. In his message to the Federal Assembly on February 17, 1998 Yeltsin described the Russian foreign policy concept in terms of "firm defence of Russia's national interests, consolidation of its role in world affairs in the interest of strengthening stability and cooperation in international relations, and establishment of a multipolar world system"[77]. Alongside the fact that Russia had consistently defended OSCE's role in the creation and developing of a new security order in Europe, Yeltsin underlined that "NATO-centrism" in all its manifestations, namely NATO expansion, remained unacceptable and that Russia would "oppose those plans firmly, although without sliding down to confrontation". On this point, Yeltsin admitted that "great expectations" were placed in the PJC as an "important instrument of cooperation on key issues for Russia, such as the transformation of NATO itself"[78]. Yeltsin also mentioned that Russia considered the Baltic states' entry into NATO as a "threat to its national interests", an event that would entail reconsideration of the whole complex of NATO-Russia relations[79]. The same

73 https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.
74 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO*, cit., pp. 71-72.
75 M.E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*, cit., pp. 258-259.
76 Ivi, p. 292; M. Albright, *Madam Secretary*, cit., p. 257.
77 *Iz poslanija Prezidenta B.N. El'cina federal'nomy sobraniju RF*, 17 fevral'ja 1998 g., VPR, 1998, D. 26, p. 127.
78 *Ibid.*
79 Ivi, p. 128.

position was expressed in January[80] and on March 12, 1999, in response to the accession to NATO of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In an official statement, the Russian government once again recalled that Russia's stance toward NATO's enlargement remained "negative". According to Moscow, the expansion of the Alliance, far from establishing trust and stability in international relations, would rather contribute to the emergence of new dividing lines. As a "constructive alternative" instead, Russia had been carrying out intensive work to create a European security system that would ensure the interests of all states without exception, regardless of their participation in any military alliance. As in the past, in Russia's plan such a structure would rely on OSCE's potential, as that of "the most representative and universal pan-European organisation, capable of dealing with all the political, economic and humanitarian challenges of the new century"[81]. However, it should be considered that at that time Russia's political leverage was undermined by a severe financial crisis, which had resulted in the Russian government defaulting on its debt. Moreover, those same countries that since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact had insistently called for their accession to the Atlantic Alliance, notably Poland, did not share Russia's stand. On the contrary, they wished for their security to be protected by means of a strategic alliance with an organisation that could, unlike OSCE, provide its member states with military assistance.

4. *The Rome Declaration*

The Kosovo war and the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in March 1999 represented a major setback to Russia-NATO relations[82]. The launching of NATO's military operation against the Serbs without a mandate from the United Nations was seen in Russia not only as a diversion from what the Contact Group had established in its meeting in Moscow the year before[83], but also as a breach of the Founding Act, in which Russia and NATO had pledged to respect the primary competence of the UN Security Council[84]. Addressing the Duma, the new Foreign Affairs minister, Igor' Ivanov, described NATO's aggression against Yugoslavia as a "heavy blow" to the efforts that had been

80 *Zajavlenije Predstavitelja MID Rossii*, 2 janvarja 1999 g., VPR, 1999, D. 1.

81 *Zajavlenije Predstavitelja MID Rossii*, 12 marta 1999 g., ivi, D. 40.

82 On Russian and American different views, E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads*, cit., pp. 178-185; M. Albright, *Madam Secretary*, cit., pp. 393-428. On the former Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's mission as Yeltsin's special representative in Kosovo, V. Chernomyrdin, *Vyzov*, Moskovskij pisatel', Moskva 2003; J. Norris, *Collision Course. NATO, Russia and Kosovo*, Praeger Publishers, Westport 2005.

83 *Zajavlenije Moskovskogo zasedanija kontaktnoj gruppy po Kosovo*, 25 fevral'ja 1998 g., VPR, 1998, D. 32, pp. 139-140.

84 Memorandum of telephone conversation with Russian President B. Yeltsin, June 15, 1998 NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4950572-Document-13-Memorandum-of-telephone-Conversation.

made in the interests of creating "a reliable security system in Europe"[85]. Ivanov held that NATO was taking advantage of the situation to expand its presence in the Balkans and that behind its military intervention stood the US, which was using the Kosovo crisis as a testing ground for the new American edition of NATO's strategic concept[86].

While NATO unilateral action proved that the consultation mechanism had failed when it came to face major issues[87], Primakov defended the efforts made to achieve an understanding with the North Atlantic Alliance. He stressed how the existence of the PJC, whose meetings were soon resumed, deterred the escalation of military actions against Yugoslavia making it possible to "move forward" after the crisis and to achieve further results, such as the signing of the Rome Declaration on May 28, 2002[88]. When the NATO countries' leaders and the president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin gathered at Pratica di Mare much had changed, primarily because of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the resurgence of the Russian-Chechen conflict. Burdened with new security challenges, the US and Russia had proved willing to cooperate rather than to quarrel over sensitive issues[89]. As a result, with the Rome Declaration NATO and Russia announced they were "opening a new page" in their relations to "enhance [their] ability to work together in areas of common interest and to stand together against common threats and risks to [their] security"[90]. To this end, the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was established, a structure in which NATO and Russia would work "as equal partners", operating on the principle of consensus. As the PJC, the new council would provide a mechanism for consultation as well as for joint decisions and actions, but its functioning was more institutionalised. Regular meetings would be scheduled at the level of Foreign and Defence ministers, at an ambassadorial level and at the level of heads of state and government. Moreover, while the meetings were to be chaired by NATO's Secretary General, all members would take joint decisions, bearing equal responsibility for their implementation.

Although the new framework for NATO-Russia relations was more similar to the aspirations that had belonged to Russia since the fall of the Iron Curtain, it differed from Russia's original plan. Since 1989, Soviet and Russian leadership had proposed to move past the existence of military alliances and to replace them with a CSCE/OSCE-centred European security system that could secure an ac-

85 *Vystuplenije ministra inostrannykh del RF na zasedanii gosudarstvennoj Dumy*, VPR, 1999, D. 45.
86 Ivi, p. 96. Cf. A. Adamishin, *The Yugoslav Prelude. A Prototype for Modern Approaches to Peacemaking*, in "Russia in Global Affairs", n. 1, 2018; MID official statement on the anniversary of NATO intervention against Yugoslavia, http://www.mid.ru/en_GB/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3583602.
87 M. Smith, *Russia and NATO*, cit., p. 75.
88 E. Primakov, *Russian Crossroads*, cit., p. 163.
89 Cf. Putin's considerations in N. Gevorkjan *et al*., *Ot pervogo lica. Razgovory c Vladimirom Putinym*, Vagrius, Moskva 2000, pp. 156 ff.; A. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 118-134.
90 https://www.nato.int/nrc-website/media/59487/2002.05.28_nrc_rome_declaration.pdf.

tual balance of power in the post-Cold War order. Such a plan seems to have failed, among the many reasons, partly due to the unwillingness of the US as well as of NATO current and prospective members to put effort into building a post-Cold War European security structure alternative to that provided by NATO's military presence. In contrast, exposed to the country's political and economic instability, Russian strategy oscillated between the quest for Russia's integration in the Western/Euro-Atlantic community and the attempt to oppose NATO's enlargement policy. Faced with the difficulties of either hindering or slowing down the Alliance's expansion process, the Russian leadership tried to limit the damage to national security interests by securing NATO's commitment to limit the growth of its military potential close to Russia's borders and to cooperate with Russia in handling European security issues. Despite their limitations, the provisions of the Pratica di Mare agreement can be considered a step forward compared to the previous deadlock. What is more, the Rome Declaration and the creation of the NATO-Russia Council remain, at least so far, the last significant *moment de détente* in Russia-NATO relations.

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