The relationship between Russia and its former allies in Eastern Europe is one of the most troubled in the world, while relations with the post-Soviet states veers between the difficult to catastrophic. Already in August 2008 the Russo-Georgian war demonstrated the potential for strained relations to turn into outright conflict, and this became even more evident from 2014 when relations with Ukraine were conclusively disrupted. The picture, nevertheless, from Russia’s perspective is not entirely bleak. A number of the ‘new Eastern European’ countries, notably Belarus (and Armenia), are closely allied with Russia, and although the relationship is far from stress-free, the fundamental interests of these countries are aligned. There are also enduring solid relations with Serbia and some other South Eastern European states, and Russia’s declarations in favour of sovereignty, legitimism and, increasingly, conservatism, find an increasingly receptive audience in the region. In one way or another, Russia remains an important actor in the region, with a diverse pattern of interactions and relationships. This chapter will examine some of the key features of the diverse relationships in a historical and theoretical context.

Sub-regional diversity

It is immediately clear that diversity is the key feature of Russia’s relations with the region. This differentiation is rooted in divergent patterns of historical development, and has profound intellectual consequences on how best we can study the region as a whole. There is no single pattern for Russia’s interactions with the region, and each one requires historical contextualisation and methodological specificity. At least four sub-regions can be identified, each with its own dynamic of interactions. I will begin with those countries geographically closest to Russia, and work out to those most peripheral.

The first sub-region encompasses the new Eastern Europe, namely those countries lying in the belt between what has now become the European Union (EU) and Russia. These are the ‘borderland’ countries, as they have always been, torn between two hegemonic geopolitical formations. Even the name of one of the countries, Ukraine, is a metonym for a land on the frontier, while the other two, Belarus and Moldova, have for most of their history been part of one or another empire. This only accentuates the novelty of the historical situation after 1991. The disintegration of the Soviet Union may have taken place relatively peacefully, but the establishment of a long-term viable relationship between Russia and the countries of the region has still not
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been found. As we shall see, the expansive dynamic of EU enlargement, and the Wider Europe project in general, collided with Russia’s aspirations to recreate some sort of Eurasian political and economic community.

No over-arching pan-European mode of reconciliation was found, now conventionally labelled Greater Europe. The idea of some sort of pan-European political and economic community stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok was outlined by Mikhail Gorbachev in his ‘Common European Home’ speech to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 6 July 1989. Over a quarter-century has passed since then, and in that period not a single fundamental developmental or international relations question has been resolved. Instead, the competitive dynamic between Russia and the EU became increasingly intense (Korosteleva, 2015). This provoked the breakdown in Ukraine and violent conflict with Russia (Menon and Rumer, 2015; Sakwa, 2015; Wilson, 2014).

Although there are profound differences between the three ‘New Eastern Europe’ countries, they share common aspirations to confirm their independent statehood while developing as unique ethno-cultural social formations. All three have historical roots stretching back centuries, and with links that embrace not only Russia but also their western neighbours, notably Poland and Romania. The rawness of their new statehood, nevertheless, accentuates sensitivities regarding the relationship with what is often perceived to be the last colonial power, namely Russia in the guise of the Soviet Union. Their emergence as independent states from this perspective is considered to be an act of anti-colonial liberation, prompting attempts to distance themselves as far as possible from Russia. In Belarus this impetus is the weakest, given the deep cultural and economic inter-penetration of the two countries, yet even here President Alexander Lukashenko, re-elected by a landslide majority for another five-year term in October 2015 after two decades in power, refused Russian plans to create a permanent airbase in the country. Lukashenko was a master at tacking between Russia and the EU to gain advantage from both (Balmaceda, 2014; Bennett, 2011; Wilson, 2011).

In Moldova the Russian-backed separatism of Transnistria remains a permanent wound in the development of the state. As far as the leadership in Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria, is concerned, their autonomous status is a necessary prophylactic in case Moldova unites with Romania. The Russian-backed Kozak Memorandum of 2003 effectively planned to turn the state into a confederation (although formally the country would remain unitary), which given the entirely different histories of the two parts of the country may well have allowed the country to unite in a form of consociational democracy. At the last minute the deal was vetoed by Washington, with the EU hastily following suit (Hill, 2012). The existence of this intractable ‘frozen conflict’ is yet another demonstration of the failure of the relevant powers to find a negotiated way out of the intractable problems facing the region. Ukraine is the most torn of the three states, with a powerful strain of monist nationalism emphasising the need to recreate Ukraine both culturally and economically separate from Russia (Kuzio and D’Anieri, 2002). This is balanced by more pluralistic representations of Ukrainian statehood, stressing the pluricultural nature of the country and the need to give constitutional form to the country’s diversity (Sakwa, 2015). The pluralists reject the simplistic anti-colonial model in favour of a more sophisticated understanding of Ukraine’s complex ‘postcolonial’ condition, in which there can be no simplistic division between coloniser and colonised, and instead stresses the mutual interactions over the centuries that have changed the identities of all concerned.

The second sub-region is made up of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. They became part of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century, and following the Russian Revolution enjoyed independence in the interwar years between 1918 and 1940. Unlike the South Caucasus states and other areas that were reincorporated into a Moscow-centred entity
after the Civil War, the Baltic republics were free to develop their statehood for two decades, although the borders were not the same as those of today. All three states accentuated the cultural and linguistic recuperation of the ethnonym, and thus began a period of what can be called restorative nationhood. The process has been well-described by Rogers Brubaker in his study of ‘nationalising states’, where a particular ethnic group considers the state as its privileged domain national for development (Brubaker, 1996). The inter-war experiment in statehood came to a brutal end following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 and its various secret protocols. In summer 1940 the countries were absorbed into the Soviet Union, accompanied by the savage destruction of the old ruling classes. The process was interrupted by the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, accompanied by the mass killing of Jews, communists and other perceived alien elements (Snyder, 2010). The restoration of Soviet power in 1944 was accompanied by mass deportations that lasted until the early 1950s, and later by the influx of Russian military and industrial settlers (particularly in Estonia and Latvia) that fundamentally changed the demographic character of the states.

Lithuania was the first of the Soviet states to declare its independence, on 11 March 1990, followed soon after by the other two republics. Given the relatively small proportion of Russians and Poles, Lithuania declared that all permanently resident in the republic were granted automatic citizenship. In Estonia and Latvia, only those who could trace their ancestry to the inter-war independent republics gained automatic citizenship, whereas others, mostly Russians but also a significant number of Ukrainians, had to achieve citizenship through what for some were onerous language and other tests. The EU’s conditionality on this issue was significantly weakened in the European Council meeting in Helsinki in December 1999, and the two republics entered the EU in 2004 with the issue unresolved. The status of the Russian minorities remains a bone of contention between Russia and the republics to this day. Equally, Vladimir Putin’s attempts to resolve the border issue by accepting the status quo as the permanent dividing line encountered the resistance of nationalists in the two republics, who still hanker over the extensive territories lost when they entered the Soviet Union in the early 1940s. A border agreement was signed with Latvia in 2007, but tensions remain with Estonia. As a result of the Syrian refugee crisis of 2015 a rampart was built between Estonia and Russia, and a fence between Latvia and Russia. This was a physical manifestation of the return of a divided Europe. The Baltic once again became a limitrophe region, as the French described the states in the inter-war years when they acted as a cordon sanitaire against Soviet Russia.

The third sub-region includes the states of the former Yugoslavia and their neighbours in South Eastern Europe. In the 1990s this was the region where Russia first came into confrontation with the west over the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo. Russia became painfully aware of its diminished status as a great power, although this did little to temper its ambitions in that respect. The pattern was established of a by-turns competitive and cooperative relationship with the EU and the Western powers in general (Talbott, 2003). Russia demonstrated a continuing affiliation with its traditional ally, Serbia, but this did not prevent some helpful engagement in regulating the war in Bosnia. No one came out of that conflict with any credit, with the siege of Sarajevo dragging on for 1,425 days, from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996.

As for Kosovo, the 78 days of NATO bombing of Serbia from 24 March 1999 was the first time that the organisation used military force without the sanction of the United Nations, justified by the need to stop human rights abuses in Kosovo. This was the turning point in Russia’s relations with the West, and lies at the basis of Putin’s accusation that the Atlantic powers ignore their own rules when convenient. Nevertheless, Russian mediation helped put an end to the bombing campaign on 10 June. The unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo on 17 February 2008, followed by its rapid recognition by the US and some leading EU powers,
another of those turning points shaping Russia’s engagement with the region and with the West as a whole. A precedent had been set for the non-negotiated change of borders. On 24 August 2008 Russia recognised the independence of the two breakaway regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in March 2014 reincorporated the Crimea into Russia. These events were symptoms of the larger breakdown of the European security order.

Russia has long-standing historical and cultural ties with the region, such as Slavic roots (Serbia and Bulgaria) and Orthodox Christianity (these two countries and Greece). Russia continues to have a close relationship with Serbia, even though the country has greatly matured politically since the traumas of the 1990s and now actively pursues EU membership. Serbia is a classic case of a country that would prefer complementary relations with both Russia and ‘Europe’ to avoid being forced to choose between them. On 16 October 2014 Putin was guest of honour at Serbia’s military parade to celebrate seventy years of liberation from Nazi Germany. The Serbian president, Tomislav Nikolić, stressed that Russia was his country’s ‘big ally’ (BBC News, 2014). Putin was greeted enthusiastically by large crowds, but with rather less enthusiasm, at a time of sanctions, in some other EU countries. Serbia is the clearest case where EU aspirations come into conflict with Russian plans for gas transit pipelines, historical notions of Slavic brotherhood, shared Orthodox Christianity, and conservative values.

These potential contradictions have also been evident in relations with the other great Orthodox country in the region, Bulgaria, reinforced by an even closer linguistic commonality. Like Serbia, Bulgaria has been a traditional Russian ally, but with the country joining the EU in 2007 the premium has been on turning formal accession into a genuine commitment to ‘Europe’. This means the employment of strategies to distance Bulgaria from Russia. Matters came to a head over plans to build the South Stream pipeline across the Black Sea to make landfall in Bulgaria and then to trace its way to markets in northern Europe. Bulgaria came under enormous pressure in 2014 to withdraw from the project, and the decision to halt preliminary construction of the pipeline sounded the death knell of the project. Putin’s shock announcement cancelling the project in December 2014 meant that Bulgaria lost potentially significant sums in transit fees and security of gas supplies. Relations with Romania remain as bad as ever, and there is little likelihood of matters changing in the near future, especially since the county (along with Poland) hosts elements of the phased ABM system, designed by the Americans allegedly to intercept Iranian missiles.

Relations with Greece have a number of distinctive characteristics. Even though Greece is a long-standing NATO member, there remain strong folk memories of Soviet support for the Communist insurgency in the Civil War in the late 1940s. Not having come under Soviet occupation, Greece was not traumatised by Soviet occupation, Stalinist repressions and Brezhnevite stagnation. There are powerful cultural ties, notably between the Orthodox monasteries that remain part of the Russian religious imaginary. The election of Alexis Tsipras and the Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left, party in January 2015 on an anti-austerity platform brought the country into confrontation with the Troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the IMF), the body negotiating since 2010 with Greece over its economic crisis. It was clear that one of the concerns of the Troika was fear that Russia would step in and use Greece as a platform in the EU if the country were to leave the euro. Tsipras cleverly exploited these fears in his negotiations with the Troika. On his second visit to Russia in as many months, Tsipras, who had joined the Communist Party (KKE) in 1991, stressed at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in June 2015 that Russia was one of Greece’s most important partners. Although Putin was keen to strengthen links with the countries of South Eastern Europe, Russia was wary of making financial commitments to the region, just as it had refused to bankroll the Republic of Cyprus in its financial crisis in 2013.
While willing to court outliers from the liberal consensus, from both left and right, Putin was careful not to overstep the mark. This applies as much to the fourth and final sub-region, the Visegrád Four, as it does to the Balkans. The grouping was originally established in 1991 by Poland, Hungary, and what were to become the Czech Republic and Slovakia to coordinate their plans for European integration. The body retains some coherence, even though all countries are now long-standing members of the EU. The relations of all four states with Russia have been characterised by various vicissitudes, and there remains an enduring legacy of suspicion accompanied by a sense of grievance and recrimination. Poland has been the country most consistently hostile to Russia. Relations are still poisoned by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Soviet invasion of 17 September 1939, and the murder of 22,000 Polish officers, reservists and professionals in Katyń, Kharkov, and Mednoe (near Tver, formerly Kalinin) in 1940 (Sanford, 2009). The crash near Smolensk of a Polish Air Force plane on 10 April 2010 that killed all ninety-six people on board, including the president of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, and a range of senior officials, became yet another cause for discord. The plane was, ironically, on its way to a ceremony marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Katyń massacre. Poland has been the most consistent country, along with Lithuania, to argue for harsh sanctions on Russia in response to the events in Ukraine.

The other Visegrád countries have adopted a more variegated approach. The former Czech president, Vaclav Klaus, has been forthright in his condemnation of what he considers to be the hubristic folly of the EU in advancing into Ukraine without adequately negotiating with Russia. Slovakia was also critical of the subsequent persistence of the sanctions regime on Russia. As for Hungary, under the leadership of Viktor Orbán the country pursued a determinedly independent path, challenging many of the EU’s orthodoxies from a radically conservative perspective. Hungary supported the sanctions policy, but warned that the EU had ‘shot itself in the foot’ by restricting trade with Russia (BBC News, 2015). In February 2015 Putin made common cause with Orbán during a visit to Budapest. Discussions centred on gas pipeline issues, with Hungary dependent for over half of its supplies on Gazprom. Putin sought to demonstrate that he retained allies in the EU and NATO.

The clash of integrations

The dominant factor shaping Russia’s engagement with the region is the emergence of competing aspirations and organisations of regional integration. This has an important effect on the way we understand the international political dynamics of the region. In particular, three formats for integration overlap and compete: the EU and its associated Wider Europe ambitions; various forms of Eurasian integration; and the residual attempt for pan-European integration outlined at the dawn of the post-communist era in Gorbachev’s plans for a Common European Home.

These alternative trajectories are typically identified with competition between democratisation and ‘autocratisation’ (Tolstrup, 2014). While the EU’s engagement is based on varying degrees of conditionality (Sasse, 2008, Schimmelfennig et al., 2006), Russian–centred integration projects make a point of stressing state sovereignty and diversity of modernisation paths. A growing literature argues that a type of ‘reverse conditionality’ (my term) applies in which more authoritarian developmental trajectories are favoured (Ambrosio, 2008; Obydenkova and Libman, 2015). In practice, Russia’s primary concern is state stability and legitimate government – in other words, opposition to what is typically perceived to be Western-sponsored regime change through ‘colour revolutions’. Equally, the EU’s democratisation endeavour is embedded in a particular neoliberal view of state development (Kurki, 2011). The net effect is that geopolitical competition between rival integration projects has become a contest between political regime types.
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The EU is clearly the preeminent body in the western part of the continent, at the heart of the Wider Europe project for the extension of the Brussels-centred order ever further to the east. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) from 2009 was only the most intense manifestation of this, with a reaction from Russia that in the end took violent forms following the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014. In this context, the ‘Europeanisation’ literature is often taken as paradigmatic, although its geopolitical assumptions have been increasingly challenged by Russia. Indeed, until the Ukraine crisis, the normative aspects of the EU’s ever-increasing reach into Eastern Europe was granted priority, and only when the power consequences of its actions were challenged in Ukraine were the underlying geopolitical assumptions exposed. Until then the discussion had focused on conditionality and external governance, as if these operated in a vacuum. Russia had long argued that one of the reasons for the deterioration of relations with the EU since the mid-2000s was the accession of a number of East European countries that introduced traditional Russophobic reflexes into the organisation, even if couched in the EU’s normative language. The creation of East Stratcom within the European External Action Service (EEAS) in April 2015 to ‘counter Russian propaganda’ is a case in point, since the need for such a unit was vigorously advanced by Polish diplomats (Panichi, 2015). From Moscow’s perspective, the EU had increasingly been transformed from a peace project that could overcome the logic of conflict into a body that perpetuated and exacerbated these conflicts in new forms.

On the other side, there were a plethora of integrative plans in the post-Soviet Eurasian region. The establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as the successor to the Soviet Union on 8 December 1991 provided the framework for the maintenance of some of the earlier links, including visa-free travel and labour mobility, but it failed to reconstitute an economic, let alone political, community. In 2007 Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan announced plans to create a Customs Union (CU) within the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc), and thereafter what is now known as the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) developed an institutional and political identity that far surpassed any other post-Soviet integration project, and soon came to challenge the EU for hegemony in the region (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2013). On 25 January 2008 Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed a tripartite customs union, and in summer 2009 agreements were signed to create the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU), formally launched on 1 January 2010, with most barriers removed by July. In the next stage, a Single Economic Space came into effect on 1 January 2012, and on 1 January 2015 the two were to combine to create the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The three states cover about three-quarters of the post-Soviet region and have a combined market of 165 million and a total GDP of around $2.3 trillion, compared to the EU’s GDP of $16.6 trillion (Dutkiewicz and Sakwa, 2015).

In other words, after a long period of hesitation and uncertainty, Eurasian integration is firmly back on Russia’s agenda, and this shapes its relations with Eastern Europe, both old and new. A clash of some sort was inevitable, but in the event when the collision came over Ukraine, it took the most catastrophic form possible. Wiser leadership on both sides could have obviated some of the worst aspects, but for too long leaders simply ignored the looming clash of integrations. As far as Moscow was concerned, the two projects could have been reconciled within the framework of the Greater Europe project, the continuation in new form of aspirations for pan-European continental integration. In the 1990s the idea lapsed, but with the evident failure to find an adequate formula to make Russia part of Wider Europe and the increasingly confrontational exercise of normative agendas, perceived in Moscow as threats when they took the form of regime change and colour revolutions, Greater Europe from the mid-2000s came back on to the agenda. The idea was to establish some sort of overarching inclusive approach to continental unification that
would allow geopolitical and ideological pluralism. Not all the problems of history had been resolved by the EU, and some states (notably Russia) were still trying to work out their political identity and destiny, and thus there needed to be a pause in the relentless advance of the west (Gromyko and Fëdorova, 2014). In the event, no such pause was given, leading to the renewed division of the continent.

**Economic factors**

The variegated sub-regional pattern is reflected in economic matters. For historical reasons the whole region remains economically tightly bound to Russia. The Baltic republics, Finland and the Central European states have traditionally been fully dependent on Russia for gas supplies; Poland is 53 per cent reliant; while Romania is almost completely self-sufficient (Chyong and Tcherneva, 2015). For some this is an unwelcome dependency, especially when transit risks across Ukraine are taken into account. This encouraged attempts to reduce dependency by diversifying supplies. The Ukraine crisis from 2014 accelerated efforts to create an Energy Union to create a European network of pipelines and power routes that would allow a stronger common front in bargaining with Russia. The obvious irony that such anti-competitive measures were sanctioned by the EU when effectively directed against Russia but condemned (in the Third Energy Package and other measures) when practiced by Russia. This only intensified Russian condemnation of ‘double standards’, although by the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century such actions were more often met with weary resignation.

The key trend now is the rupturing of traditional ties and the reorientation of economic activity to the west. The imposition of sanctions in 2014 hastened the process, and throughout the region economic ties wilted. For example, Latvia had long acted as an *entrepôt* for Russian oil supplies, and this now declined sharply. Following the Maidan revolution the new government in Ukraine enthusiastically joined this process, and trade with Russia fell by over a third in 2014 alone. Following the signature of its Association Agreement on 27 June 2014, Moldova also reoriented its economy towards the EU.

This left only Belarus, but even here there were attempts to diversify. Belarus is in a category of its own, having become part of a nominal ‘union state’ with Russia since April 1997, supplemented since then by several treaties. Belarus was one of the founder members of the EEU, and its economy is deeply entwined with that of Russia. The Belarus social model can only survive with generous subsidies from Russia, mainly taking the indirect form of cheap energy exports to the country, the oil part of which is then refined in Belarus and exported to Europe with great profit.

Russian economic penetration of the region is not limited to the energy sphere. Before the imposition of sanctions, a tightly interwoven market in agricultural goods had emerged. This meant that Poland supplied a large proportion of Russia’s market in apples, and several other countries supplied Russia with dairy products. Russian banks and other companies also created a significant presence in the region (Tsygankov, 2006). Russians also established themselves across the region in the housing market, and in some places became the single largest foreign presence, notably along the Montenegrin coast. Russian tourists became the single largest cohort in certain parts of Greece and Italy, and were famous for their relatively high spending per capita, especially in comparison with the rather more parsimonious Germans. The growing interdependence between Russia and the region was sharply reversed by the imposition of sanctions, a development that conspiracy theorists suggested was the American goal all along. Whether intended or not, the Ukraine crisis introduced a major rupture between Russia and the region, one that will take decades to overcome.
Security dilemmas

A security dilemma, as defined by Robert Jervis (1976), is a situation where the attempt to bolster the security of one state or group of states is perceived to threaten another state, which in turn responds in a manner which only intensifies the security risks of the original state or states. In those terms, the whole post–Cold War period has seen a massive security dilemma in relations between Russia and the region. The advance of NATO to encompass the Baltic republics, central and parts of southeast Europe, and the promise at the Bucharest summit in April 2008 that membership would ultimately be granted to Georgia and Ukraine, was perceived in Moscow as an escalating and long-term threat. For the East Europeans, NATO membership was the ultimate guarantee for their own security, but the very act of trying to achieve their own security reduced the common quotient of security for the whole region. The Russo-Georgia war in 2008 can be dubbed the first war to stop NATO enlargement, and the destructive dynamic culminated in the Ukraine crisis.

Moscow was at the centre of an alternative security system. The CIS was buttressed by security cooperation between countries signing the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty (CST) agreements in 1992, which on 14 May 1999 was transformed into the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). The CSTO at that time united Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, while Uzbekistan periodically joined and left. In May 2003 CSTO adopted an ambitious security agenda, including a joint military command in Moscow, a rapid reaction force, a common air defence system, and ‘coordinated action’ in foreign, security and defence policy (Allison, White and Light, 2005). The grouping has international status, and is recognized as an observer organisation at the UN General Assembly. Putin sought to raise its status further by establishing direct contacts between CSTO and NATO, something resisted by the latter since it would effectively grant CSTO parity status. Through the CSTO Russia has supplied its partners with armaments at preferential domestic prices, notably to Belarus and Armenia. The CSTO sought to give institutional form to the creation of a regional security complex, as described by Buzan and Waever (2003). The existence of such a complex was intended to provide a platform for the pursuit of Russia’s broader goals, notably opposition to NATO enlargement. The prevention of NATO’s extension into the post-Soviet region (excluding the Baltic republics), was not simply intended to ensure Russia’s pre-eminence in post-Soviet Eurasia but sought to reinforce Russia’s claims to be an autonomous great power.

While the argument in favour of the sovereign right of states to make their own choices is a powerful one, these choices are never taken in a vacuum and the overall security of a region has to be taken into account. While NATO may well have considered itself a benign body with no aggressive intentions, the earlier intervention in Kosovo and then in Afghanistan inevitably worried military planners in Moscow. These concerns were exacerbated by plans to introduce elements of a ballistic missile defence system into the region. America’s unilateral abrogation in 2002 of the ABM treaty, the cornerstone of nuclear defence architecture in the Cold War years, added to these concerns.

Overarching the whole security dilemma in relations between Russia and the region was the perception that the Atlantic power constellation was gaining in power, ambition and reach. This power constellation effectively meant that the EU and NATO became part of a single power system bringing in America but excluding Russia. The Atlantic system established a new polarity, inevitably provoking a reaction through the creation of some sort of balancing mechanism. Once again, the potential for a clash could have been obviated, at least in Moscow’s eyes, if some sort of pan-European security system could have been created to soften the hard edge between Russia and the Atlantic macro-region. This in essence was the aim of President Dmitry Medvedev’s call
in Berlin in June 2008 for a new security treaty in Europe. The initiative was shunted off into the Corfu Process under the aegis of the OSCE, and soon after forgotten. The proposal did lack detail, but it nevertheless represented an attempt by Russia to create new modes of reconciliation in Europe. Instead, the gap between Atlantic and continental visions of Europe grew larger, creating the gulf that we see today.

Conclusion

The conclusion to our study of Russia in the region is clear. A new iron curtain is in the making, no longer stretching from Stettin in the Adriatic to Trieste on the Adriatic, but from Narva in the Adriatic to Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. Aspirations for a continent ‘whole and free’ voiced at the end of the Cold War have given way to something akin to a new cold war, although no longer with global reach or the ideological overlay of the original. It is too easy to blame one side or the other, but what has really happened is the failure of political imagination. Western institutions and ideas after 1989 emerged with greater confidence, and made strong efforts to bring Russia into an expanding Atlantic community. Russia was initially receptive to becoming part of an enlarged European and Western community, but it would always be an aberrant member of an Atlantic system.

With interests in Eurasia and with global ambitions as a former superpower and still one of the world’s major states, it would not be possible for Russia to become part of an existing order which it had not helped shape and in which it would be a subaltern power. Thus a negative dynamic was established that degenerated into outright conflict over Ukraine. Russia still has its friends and some influence in the region, notably through economic links and the presence of a significant Russian cultural presence, but the overall story is one of failure. No effective mode of reconciliation was devised – either institutional or in processes – to create a common sense of belonging between Russia and the countries of the region. The tectonic plates have now moved apart with the fault line running through the middle of the region, and it will be the responsibility of a new generation of politicians and citizens to heal the wounds and to reunite the region and the continent.

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