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## *Gorbachev's 'Common European Home' and its relevance for Russian foreign policy today*

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### **Abstract:**

At the end of the 1980s the Soviet Union's last leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, launched the idea of a 'Common European Home'. It was part of his campaign for New Political Thinking in foreign policy, which aimed to deideologise the Soviet approach to international affairs, and positioned the country firmly within a European political community and civilisation. While the concept Common European Home has faded away with the Soviet Union, many of its supporting ideas resonate in Russia's foreign policy discourse under Putin. Four similarities stand out: the preference for a multipolar Europe without dividing lines, indivisible and collective pan-European security, free trade from Lisbon to Vladivostok and intra-European relations founded on international law. But some fundamental characteristics have changed. First, the context of Russian-European relations has altered substantially and many ideas are now used in an antagonistic context, to reject Euro-Atlantic hegemony. Even if the wording often remains similar, the emphasis is now on Russia's sovereign and independent path. Secondly, the core idea of a unified European civilisation has been replaced by the notion of competition between civilisations. Hereby Russia claims to represent genuine European values, giving the latter a strongly conservative interpretation. Finally, the Eurasian turn in Russian foreign policy has undermined the centrality of Europe in its discourse. Rather than envisaging a collaborative Europe, Russian and EU integration initiatives are seen as rivalling. This evolution of Russia's vision on Europe did not change abruptly with Putin's ascent to power but built up gradually in the decade before the Ukraine crisis, against a background of escalating tensions and growing distrust.

**Keywords:** Gorbachev, 'Common European Home', New Political Thinking, Putin, Russia, European Union

“Victor Hugo said that the day would come when you, France, you, Russia, you, Italy, you, England, you Germany — all of you, all the nations of the continent — will, without losing your distinguishing features and your splendid distinctiveness, merge inseparably into some high society and form a European brotherhood (...). The day would come when the only battlefield would be markets open for trade and minds open to ideas.” (Mikhail Gorbachev, 1989)

## **Introduction**

In the late 1980s Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev made the headlines launching the concept ‘Common European Home’, a metaphor for a unified pan-European space, in which West and East would cooperate while maintaining their diversity. What is the relevance of this concept for today’s Russian foreign policy discourse? Which lessons can be drawn for contemporary pan-European relations? Since tensions culminated into the Ukraine crisis (Haukkala, 2015), relations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community have found themselves in the deepest crisis since the end of the Soviet Union. The idea of a Common European Home, an architecture for pan-European security and cooperation based on a balance of interests and common values, seems further than ever. Yet, it makes sense to revisit the concept. Many ideas behind this vaguely defined term have continued to appear in later Russian foreign policy rhetoric. However, as will be argued in this article, the context has changed substantially and with it the meaning that is given to these ideas.

The article starts by revisiting Gorbachev’s concept of Common European Home and situates it in his radical reform of Soviet foreign policy. After that, similarities and differences are explored between this concept and Russia’s European policy under Putin. The emphasis is on the change of foreign policy discourse and relies on a comparative analysis of the conceptualisation of Europe – and Russia’s relative position to it – in various Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation.

## **1. Revisiting Gorbachev’s ‘Common European Home’**

### ***1.1. New Political Thinking***

Gorbachev’s reform policy in the second half of the 1980s was sustained by three different pillars. Two of them still resonate in most languages: *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The first refers to the Soviet leader’s campaign to create openness and later on democratisation. The second refers to a policy of restructuring, first hesitant economic reforms, later on drastic liberal reforms. The third pillar does not resonate as strongly, in lack of a simple Russian catchword, but was probably the most important of all: New Political Thinking. It was in the field of foreign policy and international relations that the USSR underwent its

most spectacular change, leading to a reversal of the Soviet foreign policy doctrine and a far reaching de-ideologisation. Within this broad framework Gorbachev used the concept of 'Common European Home', a symbolically powerful term – bordering on utopian – rather than a detailed blueprint for a new pan-European order.

Until Gorbachev's reforms, Soviet foreign policy had been framed in strong ideological terms. It was dominated by the 'two camp doctrine', dating back to the early Soviet years, regarding the world as "definitely and irrevocably split into two camps: the camp of imperialism and the camp of socialism ... [and the struggle between them] ... constitutes the hub of present-day affairs, determines the whole substance of the present home and foreign policies of the leaders of the old and the new world" (Stalin quoted in Kubálková and Cruickshank, 2015). This doctrine was a projection of the class struggle onto the international level. In the same way as the class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie was inevitable, the struggle between capitalism and socialism was unavoidable. Along the same pattern socialism would in the end be victorious. Later on, in particular during the *détente*, this view was nuanced to that of 'peaceful coexistence' between both camps. Rather than overruling the idea of an inevitable struggle, it took it to a new level, that of competition in various domains, including ideological, economic and cultural.

The New Political Thinking of the second half of the 1980s constituted a radical break with this ideological approach. It was built on three assumptions about international relations. First, the world had become increasingly interdependent. Secondly, global problems forced all countries to cooperate. This cooperation had become a matter of survival, because of the threat of nuclear annihilation and common ecological threats. Thirdly, war between capitalist countries was no longer seen as inevitable. Capitalist economies could develop without militarisation and development could be reached through disarmament. As a result, the Marxist-Leninist theory of imperialism needed to be adjusted.

On this basis Gorbachev developed a radically new view of international relations in which 'human values' and the survival of mankind had absolute priority. International cooperation (not just peaceful coexistence) was to replace the two camp vision. Finally, there was a need for a system of universal security. In terms of military doctrine this was translated into the principle of "reasonable sufficiency" of military capabilities and "defensive defence" (Gorbachev, 1988). Many of these ideas were developed in his speeches and writings, mainly his book *Perestroika* (Gorbachev, 1987). The rupture with the traditional ideological framing of foreign policy could hardly be bigger. With the change of emphasis from class to humanitarianism, there is no field in which we witnessed a more "dramatic deleninisation" (Sakwa, 1990, p. 322) than in foreign policy. But the New Political Thinking went well beyond words and was translated into unseen diplomatic demarches, such as the far reaching unilateral disarmament the Soviet leader proposed in his speech at the United Nations in 1988 (Gorbachev, 1988). Gorbachev also stressed the need to democratise international relations and the right of any state to make sovereign choices. The latter would

lead to no less than the burial of the Brezhnev doctrine, which had served to justify military intervention in socialist countries where socialism was ‘threatened’. Tongue-in-cheek the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gerasimov, stated that the Brezhnev doctrine was replaced by the Sinatra doctrine: as in Frank Sinatra’s song ‘I did it my way’ the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe had the right to do it their own way (Kull, 1992, pp. 139-140). This message was not misunderstood in countries like Poland, where the governments started round table talks with the opposition, or in Hungary, where the authorities dismantled the iron curtain. Both events set into motion the radical changes of 1989 and the eventual collapse of the communist regimes in the satellite states.

### *1.2. The European Common Home*

It is within this context that Gorbachev’s proposal for a Common European Home needs to be situated. The term is mostly associated with his address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1989 (Gorbachev 1989), which was entirely devoted to this theme. Yet, he used the term earlier and even prior to becoming Secretary-General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in a speech in London in 1984 (Rey, 2004, p. 34).<sup>1</sup> Over time the concept developed from an image and a metaphor to a proposal for a pan-European architecture. Yet, it never took the form of a detailed blueprint and “lacked substance” (Sakwa, 2014, p. 252). Like New Political Thinking it reflects the ambition to deideologise international politics (Kull, 1992) and is profoundly idealistic (Rey, 2004, p. 39).

In Strasbourg Gorbachev stated:

... Europeans can meet the challenges of the coming century only by pooling their efforts. We are convinced that what they need is one Europe — peaceful and democratic, a Europe that maintains all its diversity and common humanistic ideas, a prosperous Europe that extends its hand to the rest of the world. A Europe that confidently advances into the future. It is in such a Europe that we visualise our own future. (Gorbachev, 1989)

The commitment to Europe was in the first place a pro-European stance, a confirmation of the Soviet Union as a European country. “The idea of a Common European Home as presented by Gorbachev may have lacked substance, but it reflected the powerful aspiration of the Soviet leader for his country to join the European political mainstream as part of a shared civilisation and political community” (Sakwa, 2014, p. 252). It was a plea for a united, peaceful, integrated European continent.

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<sup>1</sup> Rey also notes that the term ‘Common European Home’ has earlier been used by Gromyko in 1972 and Brezhnev in 1981 (Rey, 2004, p. 34).

At the heart of the concept of Common European Home is “a restructuring of the international order existing in Europe that would put the European common values in the forefront and make it possible to replace the traditional balance of forces with a balance of interests” (Gorbachev, 1989). It is a house with several rooms, representing heterogeneity. Unity in diversity is key (Kull, 1992, pp. 146-147). It represents a multipolar, pluralistic vision of Europe, without centre of power (Sakwa, 2014, p. 27).

As stated, the Common European Home concept was all but a blueprint for the aspired pan-European order, but at some instances Gorbachev got into more detail. The house can be represented as consisting of four different levels (Rey, 2004, on the basis of three speeches by Gorbachev). The Helsinki geopolitical order (including the recognition of borders) formed the foundations of the house. The first level was based on collective security and maximal disarmament. In the longer term it provided for the disappearance of alliances, which was later reframed as their transformation “into political organizations that could actively contribute to the rapprochement” (Rey, 2004, p. 40). The second level represented the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the third economic and trade cooperation and the fourth a European cultural community.

In his Strasbourg speech, Gorbachev used a somewhat different metaphor, calling security the foundation of a common European home and “all-round cooperation ... its bearing frame” (Gorbachev, 1989). He also suggested that the Common European Home should be thought of “as a community rooted in law” (Gorbachev, 1989). Further, he added ecological, humanitarian, cultural and economic dimensions. As to the latter he called for “the emergence of a vast economic space from the Atlantic to the Urals where Eastern and Western parts would be strongly interlocked” (Gorbachev, 1989). The US and Canada were not part of the Common European Home, but were seen as “fully associated with the project” (Rey, 2004, p. 39). The latter broke with the traditional Soviet ambition to decouple the US and Western Europe (Rey, 2004, p. 37), which would have made the project an easy target for Western critique.

The political translation of Gorbachev’s idea of a Common European Home has been rather weak, despite the fact that it evolved from an image for public diplomacy purposes to more specific proposals to establish a pan-European political organisation and despite the increasingly positive reception in France and Germany. The rapid developments from 1989 to 1991 overtook Gorbachev’s plans. In 1989 regimes changed in Central and Eastern Europe. Post-communist regimes sought membership of NATO and steered towards a rupture with the Soviet Union, rather than aspiring to occupy one of the rooms in the Common European Home. NATO would thus be reinforced rather than dissolved or transformed, as hoped for, while simultaneously the Warsaw Pact crumbled. On top of that, the question of German unification dominated the agenda, leading to disagreements over whether there should be two German rooms in the European house and later whether a united Germany could be a NATO member. On top of that, Gorbachev’s reforms ran into

disarray, facing both demands for more drastic change and increasing internal opposition, eventually throwing the USSR into instability in 1991.

Arguably the CSCE ‘Charter of Paris for a New Europe’ of 1990 reflects some of the ideas of a Common European Home most closely. The preamble stated:

Europe is liberating itself from the legacy of the past. The courage of men and women, the strength of the will of the peoples and the power of the ideas of the Helsinki Final Act have opened a new era of democracy, peace and unity in Europe. Ours is a time for fulfilling the hopes and expectations our peoples have cherished for decades: steadfast commitment to democracy based on human rights and fundamental freedoms; prosperity through economic liberty and social justice; and equal security for all our countries. (Charter of Paris, 1990)

The charter breathes a spirit of cooperation and unity of Europe. Like the Common European Home project, it went beyond the Helsinki Final Act’s ambition of peaceful coexistence, calling for a substantial cooperation. Equally like the Common European Home idea, the Charter remained rather vague. Its real political impact was quickly overshadowed by the bigger items on the agenda: the eastward extension of existing Euro-Atlantic international structures, NATO and the EU. Moreover, the Charter confirmed the participation of the US and Canada as fundamental, not as simply associated as Soviet foreign policy wanted it.

## **2. The Significance of the Common European Home for Russian Foreign Policy Today**

Fast forward from the Gorbachev years to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin wall. In the aftermath of the eruption of the Ukraine crisis, earlier in 2014, the architect of the Common European Home held a gloomy speech about the advent of a “new Cold War” and blamed it on Western triumphalism:

The end of the Cold War was just the beginning of the path towards a new Europe and a safer world order. But, instead of building new mechanisms and institutions of European security and pursuing a major demilitarization of European politics – as promised, incidentally, in NATO’s London Declaration – the West, and particularly the United States, declared victory in the Cold War. Euphoria and triumphalism went to the heads of Western leaders. Taking advantage of Russia’s weakening and the lack of a counterweight, they claimed monopoly leadership and domination in the world, refusing to heed words of caution from many of those present here. The events of the past few months [related to the Ukraine crisis] are consequences of short-sighted policies, of seeking to impose one’s will and *faits accomplis* while ignoring the interests of one’s partners. ... To put it metaphorically, a blister has now turned into a bloody, festering wound. ... And who

is suffering the most from what's happening? I think the answer is more than clear: It is Europe, our common home. Instead of becoming a leader of change in a global world, Europe has turned into an arena of political upheaval, of competition for spheres of influence and, finally, of military conflict. (Gorbachev, 2014)

In this context, what is the significance of the Common European Home for Russia's foreign policy discourse on Europe today? To what extent have elements been retained? Despite the disappearance of the concept itself, quite some terms are strikingly similar. But it goes without saying that there are also substantial differences. The next sections compare Russian foreign policy rhetoric under Putin with that of the Common European Home. On the basis of the Foreign Policy Concepts and other central documents it lists similarities and differences. Self-evidently the selection is not exhaustive.

### **3. Constant ideas**

In the Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 – more than 8 years after Putin's ascent to power – it is stated: “Russia calls for building a truly unified Europe without divisive lines through equal interaction between Russia, the European Union and the United States” (Foreign Policy Concept, 2008, p. 20). The phrasing is very similar to that of Gorbachev. But also when we look at some specifics, there are more matches than one would expect. Four in particular need to be mentioned: multipolar Europe, indivisible security, pan-European free trade and a legal basis for intra-European relations.

#### **3.1. Multipolar Europe**

The idea of a multipolar European continent has been a constant factor in Russian post-communist foreign policy. The idea that the Russian Federation would be one of the key players in a new Europe went hand in hand with the ambition to regain status after the crumbling of the Soviet Union. Richard Sakwa describes the Russian post-Cold War project as ‘Greater Europe’. It is “a vision of a continental Europe, stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, that has multiple centres, including Brussels, Moscow and Ankara, but with a common purpose in overcoming the divisions that have traditionally plagued the continent” (Sakwa, 2014, p. 27). The similarities with Gorbachev's view of a European continent, united in diversity, consisting of different centres of power stand out. The Greater Europe view is diametrically opposed to the ‘Wider Europe’ project of the Euro-Atlantic community, seeking to reinforce and extend existing ‘western’ structures of political, security and economic cooperation. The latter project sees power as unipolar, symbolically concentrated in Brussels (where the headquarters of NATO and most EU institutions are based), from where concentric circles emanate over the continent. Initially Russia was willing to accept Euro-Atlantic leadership, in the



early 1990s through an America first policy, later in the same decade by prioritising the EU as its primary partner (Medium-term Strategy, 1989).

Under Putin the ambition of a close partnership with the EU did not really disappear. In his first term as President Russia and the EU entered into a Strategic Partnership and agreed on Four Common Spaces of cooperation at their summit meeting in St. Petersburg in 2003. Yet, increasingly Moscow started to reject Euro-Atlantic leadership. Arguably, the contours of an independent course crystallised around 2004-2007. The emphasis shifted to what Gorbachev called a ‘balance of interests’, a partnership that promises to recognise mutual interest, rather than based on a community of shared values. One could see this evolution as a different way of Russia to achieve status enhancement (Freire, 2011; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014). While throughout the 1990s it was aiming to regain great power status by trying to be an acceptable partner within a Euro-Atlantic Community of states, it changed towards a strategy of pursuing its interests more independently. This change of course is partly due to domestic changes in Russia, but to a bigger extent to the increasing frustration of not receiving the recognition as a great power and equal partner.

### **3.2. Security: indivisible and collective**

When it comes to security, the standard in Russian post-communist foreign policy documents is and remains the need for an “equitable and indivisible system of pan-European security” (Foreign Policy Concept, 2013, art. 62). Also in his Munich speech of 2007 Putin referred to the ‘universal, indivisible character of security’ (Putin, 2007). This recurring thought in Russian foreign policy mirrors Gorbachev’s New Political Thinking. Yet, while in the context of Gorbachev, the point of departure was a bipolar international system, for Putin the concept clearly becomes a way of objecting to the unipolar system, dominated by the US.

The system preferred on these grounds is a pan-European collective security system (see for example Mid-term Strategy, 1999; Foreign Policy Concept, 2008; National Security Concept, 2015). In the Mid-term strategy of 1999, Moscow still saw the OSCE as the platform for such a security system. Yet, soon after that Russia’s love for the organisation cooled down and Moscow regularly accused it of applying double standards in favour of the West. Moreover, the OSCE represented a fairly weak collective security system, operating in the shadow of NATO as collective defence organisation. The OSCE’s role as a basis for building a collective security system did not disappear from Russian discourse altogether but was accompanied by calls to reform the OSCE.

Under Medvedev’s presidency, the emphasis changed. Medvedev presented in 2009 a draft European Security Treaty, where he suggested the merger of NATO and the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation) into a pan-European collective security system (European Security Treaty, 2009). This was a largely symbolic proposal, politely received

and rapidly shelved by the Euro-Atlantic community. The similarity with Gorbachev's idea to transform the military alliances (then NATO and Warsaw Pact) into organisations for rapprochement in a collective security system is striking. Medvedev's proposal underlined that the idea of a pan-European collective security system without military alliances continued to be high on the Russian wish list.

### **3.3. Economic and trade cooperation**

Ever since the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) came into force in 1997, the creation of a Free Trade Area between Russia and the EU has been declared a formal objective of EU-Russia collaboration (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement 1997). The objective was repeated and reinforced in the framework of a Common Economic Space, one of the Four Common Spaces agreed in 2003 and translated into Roadmaps in 2005. Again, this idea is by no means new. As mentioned above, Gorbachev referred to the creation of an economic space from the Atlantic to the Urals as part of his Common European Home project. The formulation may have been slightly different; the core idea was identical to the later oft used call to establish a common economic space 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok'.

Yet progress in this field has been extremely limited. The PCA, which entered into force in 1997, was agreed for a period of ten years. With the expiry date approaching Moscow and Brussels started negotiating a new, enhanced agreement to replace the PCA. They failed to make tangible progress towards a Free Trade Area and the PCA was therefore silently prolonged, as provided by the treaty.

However far off it may seem now, a pan-European free trade area could have helped to resolve the incompatibility of membership of the Eurasian Economic Union and a free trade deal with the EU. It was this incompatibility that forced countries like Ukraine and Armenia to make a choice *between* Russia and the EU – a choice which in the case of Kyiv contributed to polarisation and turmoil.

### **3.4. International Law**

Gorbachev emphasised the importance of international law as a basis both for international relations and for the Common European Home. This theme keeps on resonating throughout Russian post-communist foreign policy rhetoric. The Foreign Policy Concept of 2016, for example, states: "Russia consistently advocates strengthening the legal foundation of international relations and complies with its international legal obligations in good faith" (Foreign Policy Concept, 2016, art. 26) In the current context the universal respect for international rules and norms is often confronted with the imposition of 'dictates' by "an elite club of [Western] countries" (Lavrov, 2017). It goes without saying that the credibility

of the Russian discourse on respect for universal legal principles got seriously damaged by the annexation of Crimea in 2014, despite Putin's attempt to invoke Kosovo as a legal precedent. Russia also referred to the right of self-determination of Crimea and the defence of the rights of the Russian minorities to justify its intervention legally. These ambiguities notwithstanding, respect for international law continues to be a linchpin in Russia's foreign policy discourse (Foreign Policy Concept, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016). Moscow has repeatedly called to base relations with the EU on a solid legal basis.

#### **4. Differences**

Despite the striking similarities in terms of terminology, there are important differences between the Gorbachev project of a Common European Home and the formulation of a post-communist European policy under Putin. Many aspects could be mentioned, such as the decreasing role of disarmament,<sup>2</sup> the ecological dimension or the disappearance of a value-based framing. Three fundamental differences will be underlined. First, the new context of relations between Russia and the EU, which has changed the meaning and purpose of some metaphors. Secondly, the disappearance of the idea of a unified European cultural community or civilisation. Finally, the Eurasian turn in Russian foreign policy, which has changed the importance of Europe in its foreign policy discourse. All these changes have to be understood in a context of gradually escalating tensions with the West, whereby a mutual logic of competition and distrust gained ground and undermined collaborative relations.<sup>3</sup>

##### ***4.1. New context, new meaning***

Metaphors get a certain meaning in a given context. When Gorbachev spoke about a Common European Home, he did so with the ambition to bridge deep differences in a bipolar system. It was a time of progressive reconciliation between the Soviet Union and the West and of exceptional optimism, in which Gorbachev spoke to a generally well willing Western audience. He framed the project as part of his bigger project of deideologising Russian foreign policy and international relations (Kull, 1992). Today, and clearly since Putin's Munich speech of 2007 (Putin, 2007), the context is substantially different. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disastrous 1990s, Russia has been seeking to make a comeback, claiming great power status, but got increasingly frustrated over the lack of recognition thereof. The context was one of dwindling trust in relations with the Euro-Atlantic Community, rather than the sharp increase of trust we witnessed in the Gorbachev days. Relations became increasingly

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<sup>2</sup> The Foreign Policy Concept of 2016 states that 'the Russian Federation seeks to bring the conventional arms control regime in Europe in line with current realities' (Foreign Policy Concept, 2016, art. 30).

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the reasons behind this escalating logic of competition, see Casier, 2016.

determined by a negative “logic of competition” (Casier, 2016), which eventually culminated in the confrontation over Ukraine (Haukkala, 2015). The emphasis in Russian foreign policy discourse was on sovereignty: Russia was no longer prepared to follow the path the West prescribed, but had the right to follow its own path independently. Also domestically, the context changed significantly. Gorbachev’s reformist approach was carried by a community of *mezhdunarodniki* (International Relations experts) (Rey, 2006) and foreign policy school of ‘Westernizers’ (Tsygankov, 2016, p. 5) pushing for substantial reforms. Putin, on the contrary, had to balance a coalition between Statists (to whom state capabilities, sovereignty and status are key) and Civilisationists (who see Russia as culturally distinct from the West), with the latter having become increasingly influential during his current term (Tsygankov, 2016). At the same time the political system had turned increasingly repressive and less democratic. As a result, the debate about pan-European cooperation got decoupled from issues of democracy and human rights – in sharp contrast to the Gorbachev days when both went hand in hand.

In sum, the current context is profoundly negative. Trust is at its deepest since the end of the Soviet Union. Russia and the West tend to read each other's behaviour in negative zero-sum terms. There are few prospects to reverse the spiral of competition. This implies that many of the concepts which Gorbachev used as positive concepts, as platform for collaboration, have now often become defensive vestiges within a broader discourse of rejecting a Western “dictate” and acting against “NATO-centric egotism” (Lavrov, 2016).

#### **4.2. European civilisation**

A second substantial difference has to do with the understanding of European civilisation and Russia’s place within it. Gorbachev put a strong emphasis on a European cultural community and civilisation, transcending the continent’s heterogeneity. Over time also the Russian Foreign Policy Concepts repeatedly refer to civilisations and Russia being an “integral and inseparable part of the European civilization” (example taken from Foreign Policy Concept, 2013, art. 56). But there is a certain ambiguity. At the same time an emphasis is put on inter-civilisational relations and the need to harmonise them. The emphasis is always on dialogue and avoiding dividing lines (Foreign Policy Concept, 2013, art. 14). This ambiguity seems to suggest that Russia is situating itself both apart from and within a European civilisation: “Russia stands ready to play a constructive role in ensuring a civilizational compatibility of Europe” (Foreign Policy Concept, 2008, p. 20).<sup>4</sup>

Overall, Russia’s relation in or to a European civilisation has taken a more antagonistic turn in recent years, when Russia and Western Europe got presented as competing civilisations. Tsygankov detects “a revival of civilizational thinking” in Russia, where the idea that Russia forms a distinct civilisation gained ground (Tsygankov, 2016, p. 150). As of 2012

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<sup>4</sup> In the post-Ukraine Foreign Policy Concept of 2016, the reference to Russia as part of a European civilisation has disappeared (Foreign Policy Concept, 2016).

Putin started advancing the idea of ‘state-civilization’, in which ethnic Russians form the central and binding force of Russia as civilisation and state, while at the same time recognising the diversity of Russia and rejecting the idea of a mono-ethnic state (Tsygankov, 2016, p. 151). At international level this gets translated into the idea of a “global competition ... on a civilizational level, whereby various values and models of development based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy start to clash and compete against each other” (Foreign Policy Concept, 2013, art. 13). This approach has been reinforced because of domestic development and as a result of the West’s Ukraine policy and sanctions against Russia in 2014. Putin also started criticising “Europe’s departure from traditional religious and family values” (Tsygankov, 2016, p. 151). In certain elite circles this discourse is even more prominent and radical. Russia presents itself as a defender of Europe’s civilisation. The interpretation of what this European civilisation stands for is a very selective one, emphasising certain traditional and spiritual values. Morozov speaks of a “paleoconservative ideology taking the upperhand in Russian domestic politics” (Morozov, 2018, p. 43). Differently from conservatives, paleoconservatives reject modernity altogether. Morozov states:

“... the radicalisation of Russia’s position through the espousal of the paleoconservative ideology and the intervention in Ukraine must be interpreted as the decisive break with the pattern of ‘hierarchical inclusion’ of Russia in Europe ... While the liberals and the moderate conservatives of the previous decade had been complaining about Russia’s unequal treatment by the EU, today’s paleoconservatives have embraced the image of Russia as a traditionalist sovereign power and, in that sense, the opposite of Europe with its moral decadence and helplessness in the face of repeated crises”. (Morozov, 2018, p. 36)

In other words, today, the idea of European civilisation itself is contested. Russia has started to challenge the EU’s dominant position in determining European identity. Countering this hegemony, Moscow claims that it stands for the ‘genuine’ values of Europe (a very conservative interpretation of these values) reproaching West-European countries of betraying the fundamental values of European civilisation. The latter has thus become an object of competition rather than of unification. This is a very fundamental difference with Gorbachev’s unifying concept of Common European Home.

### ***4.3. Europe first?***

The third substantial difference has to do with the importance of Europe in foreign policy. For Gorbachev the Common European Home was a central concept, a frame to reorient the Soviet foreign policy towards close cooperation within greater Europe. The countries of Western Europe and the European Community were the preferred partners and the US and

Canada were to be associated at best. Interregional links between the European Community and the Comecon/CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) played a key role in the common home. A decade later, in 1999, the Mid-term Strategy prioritised the EU as key partner and the relationship between both actors was eventually solidified through the EU-Russia Strategic Partnership. The latter grew into the EU's most institutionalised relationship: with no country did the EU have more frequent high-level meetings than with Russia. Despite rising tensions this link continued to exist until the Ukraine crisis and annexation of Crimea, when the EU suspended the Strategic Partnership.

While the term 'Common European Home' disappeared from official statements, Russia continued for a long time to stress the importance of Europe, the primordality of relations with the EU and its adherence to the Council of Europe and in a more nuanced way the OSCE. In the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 relations with European states are called "a traditional foreign policy priority" (Foreign Policy Concept, 2000, p. 7). The Concept of 2008 mentions that "the Russian Federation is interested in strengthening the European Union" (Foreign Policy Concept, 2008, p. 21) as well as the interaction mechanisms with it through the establishment of the Common Spaces agreed in 2003. The Foreign Policy Concept of 2013, shortly before the Ukraine crisis, is an interesting mix. On one hand, in the aftermath of the Partnership for Modernisation, it confirms the Russian interest "in enhancing cooperation with the European Union as its principal trade and economic counterpart and important foreign policy partner" (Foreign Policy Concept, 2013, art. 57) It is also stated:

Priority is given to relations with the Euro-Atlantic states which, besides geography, economy and history, have common deep-rooted civilizational ties with Russia. In light of the increased importance of combining efforts of all the states in the face of transborder challenges and threats, Russia stands for building up a truly unified region without dividing lines through developing genuine partnership relations between Russia, the European Union and the United States. (Foreign Policy Concept, 2013, art. 54)

On the other hand, the Concept confirms a difference in emphasis, a shift of the world's centres of gravity to the Asia-Pacific: "The ability of the West to dominate world economy and politics continues to diminish. The global power and development potential is now more dispersed and is shifting to the East, primarily to the Asia-Pacific region. The emergence of new global economic and political actors with Western countries trying to preserve their traditional positions enhances global competition, which is manifested in growing instability in international relations" (Foreign Policy Concept, 2013, art. 6). As the US did under the Obama administration, Russia announced its own pivot to Asia. At this point, this remained largely rhetoric. The emphasis changed, but for Asia to take the place of Europe would inevitably be a long term process. Also the driving

role Russia plays in the BRICS consultations underlines the shift away from Europe and from the West in general.<sup>5</sup>

In the Foreign Policy Concept of 2016 the EU is still called an important trade partner, but otherwise all positive references to the EU and Euro-Atlantic states disappeared. In the context of the Ukraine crisis the tone of the document now revolves around the responsibility of Western states for the current crisis, because of “the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) along with their refusal to begin implementation of political statements regarding the creation of a common European security and cooperation framework” and a “containment policy by the US and their allies” (Foreign Policy Concept, 2016, art. 61).

Of great significance were the Eurasian integration initiatives that took shape as of 2010. Russia had always prioritised integration of the former Soviet states under its regional leadership. Yet the Eurasian integration initiatives signalled an important change. For a long time, Russia had prioritised integration under the umbrella of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but this had rarely been effective. With the proposal of a Eurasian Union in 2011 Putin changed course to integration initiatives based on coalitions of the willing: Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in the first place. Importantly, in 2011, Putin did not present the Eurasian Union as a rival or alternative for the EU, but as “a powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world and serving as an efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region” (Putin, 2011).<sup>6</sup> He added:

Some of our neighbours explain their lack of interest in joining forward-looking integration projects in the post-Soviet space by saying that these projects contradict their pro-European stance. I believe that this is a false antithesis. We do not intend to cut ourselves off, nor do we plan to stand in opposition to anyone. The Eurasian Union will be based on universal integration principles as an essential part of Greater Europe united by shared values of freedom, democracy, and market laws. Russia and the EU agreed to form a common economic space and coordinate economic regulations without the establishment of supranational structures back in 2003. In line with this idea, we proposed setting up a harmonised community of economies stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, a free trade zone and even employing more sophisticated integration patterns. (Putin 2011)

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the renewed confrontation between Russia and the West differs fundamentally from the Cold War in that bipolarity and power symmetry have given way for a much more complex international system and a major power gap between the Euro-Atlantic Community and Russia.

<sup>6</sup> This thought was repeated in different forms in respective Foreign Policy Concepts, where the Eurasian Economic Union was presented as an “effective link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region” (Foreign Policy Concept 2013, art. 44) or the priority was mentioned of “harmonizing and aligning interests of European and Eurasian integration processes” (Foreign Policy Concept 2016, art. 63).

In this formulation there is no contradiction with Gorbachev's and later official Russian views on Greater Europe, multipolarity, interregional cooperation, a European-wide free trade area. Nor does Putin backtrack on the importance of the EU as primordial partner.

Yet, this changed as mutual suspicion of the EU and Russia over each other's integration projects increased. With the incompatibility of EU and Russian integration projects arising (see above) the tone shifted and Eurasian integration got presented as an alternative to cooperation with the EU, no longer a bridge. Fuelled by the Ukraine crisis the emphasis was put even more strongly on Eurasian cooperation and rivalling integration projects: the West was accused of "countering integration processes and creating seats of tension in the Eurasian region" (National Security Strategy, 2015, art. 17).

With the increasing use of references to Eurasian, the Euro-Atlantic space stopped being the key point of reference in Russian foreign policy, as it was under Medvedev's presidency. Yet, this as well is fraught with ambiguity. Eurasian economic integration itself is to a large extent modelled after the EU and thus represents a neoliberal template (Morozov, 2018, p. 35). Yet, at the same time the term Eurasian can have geopolitical or civilizational connotations. It is a difficult term to use as it represents many strands, generations and degrees of radicalism. Yet, with an increasing emphasis on Eurasian as a qualifier, the question can be raised whether Eurasianism is still the "metaphorical dog that did not bark" which Natalia Morozova claimed it to be under Putin at the time of writing (Morozova, 2009, p. 683).

## **5. Conclusion**

Even though Gorbachev's concept of Common European Home was short-lived, many of its central ideas survived the Soviet Union and continued to influence Russian foreign policy rhetoric for many years. Ideas of a multipolar Europe with pan-European indivisible collective security, rooted in law and with a free trade area from Lisbon to Vladivostok continued to be hallmarks of Russia's European policy discourse until fairly recently. But some major changes also occurred. Not least the context. With views of the post-Cold War European security order at loggerheads, relations came to be dominated by a logic of competition and distrust, in contrast to the cooperative atmosphere of the late Gorbachev years. In this context some words obtained substantially new meanings and often became an instrument for defence rather than cooperation. Secondly, the idea of a common European civilisation of which Russia was an essential part disappeared. The interpretation that a civilizational competition is taking place gained ground. The influence of deeply conservative views that Russia represents the genuine values of Europe, which the West has betrayed, has grown strongly. Today Russia sets itself apart from (the rest of) Europe. Finally, Europe has lost its central role and the positive evaluation of the EU as primordial partner has faded away. Moscow announced its own pivot to Asia but also invested in its own Eurasian integration projects. While the



latter were introduced as complementary, Russian and EU-driven integration projects have increasingly become rivalling and contentious issues. Several of these developments have occurred in the years before the Ukraine crisis, but the latter has definitely fuelled and radicalised this evolution. The real rupture with the original Common European Home concept is thus not so much Putin's ascent to power, but the tensions leading up to the confrontation over Ukraine and the escalation the crisis itself produced. Within a context of a re-emerging Russia and domestic change, as well as tensions over NATO enlargement and the missile defence shield, trust between Russia and the rest of Europe dwindled and gradually made way for zero-sum thinking. Without abandoning them altogether, some key terms in Russia's vision of Europe were given a new role in a counter-hegemonic discourse, challenging the dominant position of the Euro-Atlantic Community.

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