Russia and the West: Options for Integration

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The problem of integrating Russia and other post-Soviet republics into the political, economic and military structures of the West has been compounded by the fact that it had to be resolved in the context of a fundamentally new power balance taking shape in the world and, above all, on the European continent. By the time the USSR broke up, united Germany was already becoming the dominant economic and political force in Europe, most capable of lending financial assistance to the Central European countries and also to the republics of the Soviet Union. The role of NATO in the future Europe was very much in debate, and it was clear that most of the US Armed Forces would be pulled out of Western Europe by the end of the decade. Some assumed that Western Europe would become a self-sufficient military force even before it entered the 21st century. The process of economic integration within the framework of the European Community had acquired new dimensions with the Community gradually accepting the idea of a confederation. It is worth noting that right from the start - since late 1991 - the debate was conducted at two levels. On the one hand it was (and still is) felt to be imperative to make urgent and indeed immediate decisions capable of averting a repetition of the ‘Yugoslav option’ anywhere in the Soviet Union. On the other hand there was a no less obvious need for long-term strategic programmes that would make it possible to organically build the countries forming the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries into regional and global actors of international relations. While the first task was to be accomplished above all by existing institutions, such as NATO, the OSCE, the EU, and the UN, the second could be left to entirely new types of mechanisms and structures that might be devised. But in the course of the debate, these two levels were quite often indistinct, giving rise to confusion and misunderstanding.

One of the most common of Western strategies is for Central and Eastern Europe to be gradually integrated into Western security structures through NATO machinery. The first step in this direction has been the
inclusion of the republics of the former Soviet Union (FSU) into the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which is often regarded as a ‘connecting link’ between NATO and the CIS. The same philosophy is behind the proposal to create a bilateral Russian-American military-political alliance that would either form part of NATO or would work in close association with it.

Some NATO supporters suggest exploiting the current favourable political opportunities for maximum ‘internationalisation’ of the nuclear weapons of Russia as well as those of the Western nations. The NATO mechanisms, in their opinion, can be used for the integration of Russia’s nuclear weapons at least at three levels: 1) financing the activities of Russia’s nuclear specialists and research institutes, aiding the implementation of the provisions of the START-1 and START-2 treaties, enhancing the safety of Russia’s nuclear facilities and preventing the drift of Russia’s nuclear technology and nuclear arms components abroad; 2) coordinating nuclear planning, expanding confidence-building measures in the nuclear field and exchanging information on the trends of nuclear technology development; 3) creating the common multilateral nuclear forces of NATO and Russia.

Of course, it is hardly possible to put together multilateral NATO nuclear forces without a radical modification of the nuclear strategy of the Western nations themselves. A point of principle in this context is whether the United States is ready to leave part of its nuclear arsenal under the control of a new multilateral structure or accept the ‘dual-key’ option. This idea has not been seriously discussed so far in Washington.

Yet another point that the champions of this model of integration of post-Soviet republics into the Western security structures see as attractive is that NATO is now beginning to diversify its functions. Along with their traditional military-political objectives, the NATO bodies are trying to make their contribution towards resolving the problems of the conversion of military production and ecology, coordinating the industrial research policies of the member countries and so forth. That is to say that linking up with NATO becomes a matter of particular value to the FSU republics while NATO for its part would obtain further important leverage on the foreign policies and defence strategies of the new states.

An extension of the ‘zone of responsibility’ of the North Atlantic Alliance to the East would make it possible, supporters of this option believe, to provide the answers to the two major ‘intra-NATO’ questions: 1) the new NATO role in the modern transitional stage of the development of the European situation; 2) the actual possibility of this bloc surviving for long.
The United States views the issue of NATO’s potential involvement in FSU territory as being related to the more general question of the future role of the United States itself in NATO. As stated earlier on, the ambition of the US to use the NATO machinery as a means of securing its political interest in Western Europe throughout the entire period of the Cold War was one of the bloc’s *raisons d’être*. Washington’s readiness to bear the disproportionate burden of NATO maintenance expenses made it possible to overcome many contradictions arising amongst the allies.

Today the necessity or even the expediency of preserving NATO as a vehicle of American influence in Europe is increasingly called into question both in Europe and in the United States. The shifting of emphasis in relations between the United States and Western Europe to the area of trade, finance and competition on the world markets has been largely depreciating the NATO mechanisms adjusted for coordination in the military-political field. Not even during the Cold War years did the Americans succeed in any way at all in getting NATO involved in the US-European Community relationship and the likelihood is, therefore, even less so now.

From this point of view, the plan for the integration of the new CIS states into Western security structures through NATO is aimed at stabilising the situation not only in the East but also in the West, charging the bloc with new functions and offering new incentives for development. It is not by chance that it should have been actively supported by American politicians and experts close to the bloc’s leadership. Moreover certain moves in this direction have already been made, particularly in 1992 when NATO representatives were involved as mediators in the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In fact, the concept of integration has been interpreted rather broadly, not only in the military-political sense but also in terms of history and philosophy. NATO is emerging as a mechanism instrumental in modernising societies, overcoming nationalistic aberrations, shaping new political elites, etc. There are four historically established models of integration of individual states into the political and military mechanisms of NATO. The first (‘German’) model presupposes the complete integration of a nation’s armed forces into the NATO structures. The second ‘French’ model in contrast limits such integration to political cooperation while leaving intact its military independence, without however, precluding consultations on specific military matters. The third model (common to the majority of the other European NATO countries) implies subordinating most of the national contingents to the unified NATO command in the event of war or an acute crisis while preserving
the autonomy of military planning and management in time of peace. Finally, the fourth (‘American’) model suggests leaving the unified NATO command in control of a smaller proportion of the national forces (deployed in Europe), given a pledge to place under it about half of the national forces deployed in other regions of the world.

Which of these models is appropriate for Russia? The most conservative assumption is the model of integration that looks practicable at least in the foreseeable future, which is the ‘French’ one, since any other would require either too much or a major painstaking reshaping within NATO. Besides, as the advocates of this model point out, Russia is not prepared at this point for a closer association with NATO. Like France in the 1960s and 1970s, Russia must yet live through a period of unalloyed nationalism (if in a moderate, not aggressive, form), notably in her foreign and defence policies. Only in 10 to 20 years from now will it be opportune to speak of Russia’s comprehensive integration into NATO’s political and military institutions.

The ‘American’ model has its own supporters, who tend to note a certain ‘symmetry’ of American and Russian positions in relation to the European continent. Since Russia is not a purely European power and her strategic interest extends to other regions of the world, it is hardly worthwhile insisting on full ‘geographic’ integration. On the other hand both established and new NATO members are hardly keen to assume any immediate obligations whatsoever regarding the southern and eastern borders of the Russian Federation.

At the same time the ‘American’ as well as the ‘French’ model for Russia’s integration may prove insufficient from the standpoint of strategic and political stability on the European continent. After all, the main problem for Russia’s foreign policy in Europe is not the inadequacy of political links with the West but the fact that most of Russia’s immediate Western neighbours - whether from among the former Soviet republics or central Europe - view the Russian Federation at least as a potential threat to their security and even to their existence as independent states. How much ground there is for such fears and whether it is right to consider Russia as a direct descendant of Soviet statism is debatable. But there is no denying the mistrust and suspicion that looms in the capitals of the neighbouring states with regard to Moscow’s policy.

In this sense the problem of Russia’s integration into the Western security system has indeed a lot in common with West Germany’s integration into NATO in the 1950s. Germany after the Second World War, just like Russia today, faced the mistrust and suspicion of her next-door neighbours, which, in fact, made it imperative to devise a special
‘German’ model of integration. It is precisely the complete integration of Germany into the North Atlantic Alliance and the ‘dissolution’ of the Bundeswehr in the NATO structures that made it possible to overcome the anti-German fears and suspicion in Western Europe.

It would be idle to presume that the ‘German’ model of the 1950s can be carbon-copied by Russia in the 1990s, not least because Russia is not a vanquished and occupied country; its sovereignty is not limited and its military machine is far from being destroyed. But if there can be any involvement of Russia at all, it will be politically worthwhile only if it is comprehensive and far-reaching. The more ‘internationalised’ are the Russian armed forces, the easier it will be for Russia to solve her political problems with her next-door neighbours.

However, it is precisely because the Russia of the 1990s is not the Germany of the 1950s that Russia’s integration into NATO and the ‘internationalisation’ of its armed forces are impossible if attempted unilaterally. To integrate Russia the present members of the bloc must basically achieve a higher level of integration themselves. Yet the political willingness of both the US and its West European partners to follow in this direction is rather open to doubt.

One idea that appears to be encouraging for Russia and other CIS countries, from those who foresee them in NATO structures, is that of creating a single American-European-Russian arms and military technology market in which Russia and the Ukraine would occupy a well-deserved place. Such a market would imply standardising all the major types of armaments, lifting the post-Soviet republics’ restrictions to the import of Western military technology, adopting common rules opening that single market to competition between producers, devising a supervision system for the export of military technology to the developing countries. Besides, as mentioned earlier, it would be possible, within the NATO framework, to coordinate efforts in relation to defence conversion and in the fields of political and military intelligence gathering and also to devise and deploy a multilateral strategic anti-missile defence system.

The idea of NATO serving as the embryo of a new European security system is under attack from another angle. There is a lack of clarity concerning the stages of integration of Eastern European states and equally concerning the criteria for the selection of candidates. Should the states of Central Europe be admitted to NATO in the first stage, the FSU republics would have good reason to consider themselves discriminated against. Should the Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic countries join the alliance in the second stage, Russia would find itself in a rather vulnerable geostrategic position. Should the criterion be the measure of progress in
democratisation and towards a market economy, the political landscape of Europe would look like a misarranged children’s puzzle. Furthermore, the selective involvement of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe in NATO could indirectly provoke further conflicts on the continent. For example, if Hungary becomes a NATO member but Romania does not, Budapest will undoubtedly be tempted to take advantage of its new status and of institutionalised Western support for stepping up pressure on Bucharest over the issue of Transylvania. The ‘selective’ inclusion of some republics of former Yugoslavia in NATO could also change the power balance in the Balkans with possible negative consequences.

Finally, there is serious doubt about NATO’s capacity for radically expanding its ‘zone of responsibility’ to the East, including such remote regions as, for example, the Caucasus or Central Asia. Optimists contend that NATO’s reaction to the Gulf crisis in 1990/91 can serve as a model for other crisis situations, including those erupting on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Indeed, as the NATO line on the Iraq-Kuwait crisis was hammered out, none of the members of the Alliance had any second thoughts regarding their part in a confrontation unrelated to the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, all members of the bloc stressed the need to come forward united, using the NATO infrastructure present in Europe. This is all the more noteworthy since in earlier years the US and its European allies had often clashed over the so-called security interests ‘outside the NATO zone’. West-European partners had traditionally opposed Washington’s attempts at extending the NATO role beyond its ‘statutory’ mission.

But it would hardly be right to draw any conclusions on the basis of this experiment regarding the possibilities of NATO in Eurasia or even in Central Europe. The crisis in the Gulf was largely a unique case of the leading Western powers finding they had strategic and economic interests to care about in common, securing Moscow’s benevolent neutrality (at least achieving unity in the Security Council), pinpointing their military objectives and bringing off an armed operation within the shortest possible time. There would be none of these conditions in the probable conflicts on FSU territory. The economic and strategic interests of the US and Western Europe may not coincide (or may not be discovered at all in regard to the Caucasus or some states of Central Asia), Russia would take its stand and largely determine the position of NATO, clear military objectives would most likely be absent and, instead of a ‘lightning war’, protracted ‘low-intensity conflicts’ could be expected. Properly speaking, the Yugoslav experience (with NATO’s obvious inability to influence the course of events in that country, although the strategic security interests of at least two members of the bloc - Greece and Turkey - were directly affected) was
far more meaningful by most parameters for the CIS than the record of the Gulf War.

What I have so far been considering are the models of integration of the CIS states into the Western security system through NATO. These models are not without alternatives; they are opposed, notably, by the concept of a pan-European OSCE-based collective security system or one involving the creation of a basically new multilateral structure embracing Europe, North America and, perhaps, Japan and a number of other states of East Asia. Supporters of this model believe that the OSCE has an important advantage over NATO inasmuch as the NATO framework leaves out some European states (Austria, Sweden, Finland, to mention just a few, not to speak of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe), while the OSCE is a truly all-European forum also including the United States and Canada. Consequently, an OSCE decision can be considered ‘legitimate’ for Europe, while any NATO decision may be challenged by states outside this bloc, at least at this point.

Besides, it has been noted that the CSCE was conceived from the very start as a collective security mechanism in Europe while the NATO bloc was created in the emergency Cold War environment to discharge functions having nothing to do with collective security. NATO’s record in settling the conflicts which have arisen between the members of the bloc can hardly be unequivocally claimed to have been successful. No way was found to stop the conflict between Greece and Turkey and the problem was referred to the United Nations. Neither was the conflict between the United Kingdom and Spain over Gibraltar resolved in Brussels: NATO preferred to qualify the Gibraltar problem as an issue for bilateral Anglo-Spanish relations. However, most of the probable international conflicts in Eastern Europe can be likened precisely to the Greek-Turkish or the Gibraltar problems rather than to a far-fetched breakthrough by Warsaw Pact tanks to the Channel which the NATO bloc was designed to oppose for decades. In other words, to turn NATO into the bedrock for a collective security system in Europe would require a revision of the very foundations of this bloc while for the OSCE such a transformation would be just a case of natural evolution.

The partisans of priority reliance on the OSCE do not deny the possible positive role of NATO in the settlement of ethnic conflicts within the FSU zone. However, they point out that the NATO role will be rather indirect. The reason why it has proved possible to avert ethnic and international conflicts in Western Europe was because the former opponents had developed a relationship of confidence and partnership. In its turn, confidence within the NATO framework was a ‘spin-off’ of the
cooperation of the members of the bloc in the military field: the probability of war between NATO members was, as a rule, in inverse proportion to the level of military integration between them. The example of the Greek-Turkish conflict confirms this dependence. Although both countries were hitched up to the basic NATO structures in the mid-70s, the level of bilateral Greek-Turkish military integration remained extremely low.

But the military integration of independent states is a rather long and painful process. It has taken several decades to succeed even in Western Europe faced with all the emergency of the Cold War situation, complete with serious breakdowns and crises. The integration of the post-Soviet republics into NATO under most favourable conditions would take even longer. Therefore the OSCE cannot leave NATO to care for the problems in Eastern Europe in the short and indeed even in the medium term. To do so, in the opinion of OSCE supporters, would mean not only indefinitely postponing the restoration of the unity of Europe but also damaging the extremely fragile unity of the NATO bloc itself.

The advocates of using the European process for stabilising the situation on FSU territory realise that these objectives cannot be achieved if the OSCE remains the occasional debating club it is. Therefore, the suggestion is to restructure the OSCE, setting up a kind of machinery and specialised institutions that would become permanent OSCE bodies and would take care of other all-European institutions concerned with security and the problems of the second and third baskets of the Final Act and cooperate with the existing European structures (above all with NATO, the European Union and the CIS).

The first serious move toward ‘institutionalising’ the CSCE was made during the pan-European summit in Paris in November 1990. It involved specifying the functions of the CSCE Council of Ministers as its executive body as well as a number of auxiliary agencies - the Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna, the Free Elections Office in Warsaw, and the permanent executive secretariat in Prague.

In the longer term - probably by the late 1990s - the OSCE could actually develop into an all-European security structure. Its first move towards creating collective European security structures would be to form a European Security Council, an all-European agency for the settlement of disputes (a European Court of Arbitration) and to launch a mechanism of protecting European security (a contingent of multinational peace-keeping forces). However, such a prospect is so far in doubt; there are too many questions concerning the future of the OSCE yet unanswered.

One of the main issues which must be settled within the framework of the functions of the OSCE and which provokes the greatest divergence of
opinion in the West is that of Russia’s rights and responsibilities in respect to the other independent states - the FSU republics. Does Russia have the right to a ‘sphere of influence’ on this territory and, if it does, how might it preclude Russian neo-imperialism and clashes with the nations of the West? Is Russia committed to supporting the neighbouring states economically (for example, by supplying them with power resources on soft terms and keeping the Russian markets open to their goods) and, if it is, how would it honour these commitments and refrain from the potential economic blackmail of other post-Soviet republics? What, in general, must be done so that the other republics need not concern themselves about any potential threat from Russia and also help prevent the latter, in turn, from feeling isolated? One of the proposed variations is a concept of ‘finlandisation’ of the FSU republics, which means writing a Western commitment into OSCE documents prohibiting the formation of military-political alliances potentially hostile to Russia in exchange for Russia’s pledge not to interfere in the internal affairs of her next-door neighbours.

Such a solution would materially lessen the possibility of a conflict of interests between Russia and the West in Eastern Europe and would make the situation in this region more stable and predictable. At the same time it would limit the possible manifestations of neo-imperialism by Russia, preventing the Russian leadership from adopting anything like a ‘Monroe doctrine’ in respect to its next-door neighbours. The ‘finlandisation’ of the FSU republics could, as some have suggested, include Russia’s undertaking to act as an economic counterbalance with regard to Eurasia, restraining excessive trading practices and monitoring monetary relations (a function similar to Germany’s role in the European Community). Finally, Russia could make itself principally responsible for the regional maintenance and development infrastructure: the transport and energy system, information and telecommunications channels and the like.

However, the prospect of such a ‘special relationship’ between the West and Russia raises a whole series of fundamental objections. First, the prospect of it being established is viewed by the conservative segment of American politicians and, above all, by the leadership of the respective ethnic communities as a ‘new Yalta,’ betraying the interests of the newly established states and de facto bringing them under Russia’s control. Most of these states are believed to hold Russia rather than anybody else as the main threat to their security and indeed to their independence and sovereignty, and, therefore, will never settle for a ‘finlandisation’.

Second, the concept of ‘finlandisation’ was based, in the opinion of liberal authors, on the implicit premise that the interests of Russia and those of the West in this part of the world would materially diverge and
even clash. Yet this kind of opposition is not obvious at all. In particular, the Yeltsin-Kozyrev policy towards the countries just across Russia’s frontiers in 1992 and 1993 aroused no particular criticism in the US. As far as the involvement of the new states in the military-political alliances, this question has not even been raised in practical terms at all so far; even the countries of Central Europe have been virtually denied admission to NATO. In this sense, implicit mutual understanding between Russia and the West is preferable to any formalised agreement.

Third, it has been noted that any variation on ‘finlandisation’ will bind the West one way or another and lead to an artificial disruption of Europe’s common security space now in the making, notably, the OSCE mechanisms. Moreover, in the event of any dramatic turn in Russia’s foreign policy, ‘finlandisation’ can even goad the new states of the region into forming an anti-Russian alliance (for instance a Ukrainian-led one) to create their own regional balance.

Fourth, political instability in Russia itself and the uncertainty of the prospect ahead for its foreign policy call into question the value of any long-term strategic compromise arrangements. Such arrangements could be disavowed or modified unilaterally by a new team of Russian leaders.

Assessments made in 1992-1993 of the performance of the CIS and of the prospect in store for it can be seen as a kind of indirect criticism of the concept of Russia’s ‘special responsibility’ in the FSU zone. These were, for the most part, characterised by extreme criticism: the CIS was originally expected to exist for just a few months, being, as a matter of fact, no more than a makeshift structure to dismantle the FSU; but that view gave way to another in the sense that the CIS could survive for a relatively long space of time just because of its institutional weakness and political nullity. The fragility of the CIS was interpreted, notably, as a sign of the weakness of Russia’s position and as evidence that the centrifugal trends on FSU territory still prevail over the centripetal ones. In this context, a ‘finlandisation’ of the republics immediately bordering on Russia appeared practically unrealisable.

Occasionally, however, the concept of ‘finlandisation’ assumed rather exotic forms. It was suggested that the zone of Russia’s ‘special responsibility’ must exclusively embrace the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, which are most interested in security guarantees from the Russian Army and are of relatively less interest to the West. As for the European republics, the West must take a tough line on any attempts by the Russian leadership to restrict the sovereignty of its neighbours (this idea fits in, by and large, with the concept of a ‘two-tier OSCE’ calling for
differing requirements and behavioural standards to be applied to the European and Asian members).

The record to hand of the inclusion of authoritarian states in the security systems and international bodies of democratic countries (for instance, the integration of Greece and Turkey and also Portugal and Spain into NATO, the CSCE and the EU) shows that democratisation is, as a rule, connected first of all with the economic rather than military-political aspect of international cooperation. If there have been any external factors that played a certain part in implanting democratic institutions in the authoritarian regimes of non-communist Europe, these were, above all, the EU, not NATO, and less still the OSCE. There is hardly any valid reason to expect any fundamentally different principles to be operable in post-communist Europe. For the post-communist states, the primacy of economic interests over those of a military-political nature is abundantly clear and will inevitably be reflected in their foreign policies.

So, whichever way the integration of the countries of Eastern Europe proceeds, either by joining the various institutions of NATO or by enlarging the competence and enhancing the effectiveness of the OSCE, these integration processes will go on in parallel with the intensified activities of the political and military structures of the EU and, more particularly, of the Western European Union (WEU) in this region. In the area of relations with the new states of Eastern Europe, as American observers note, the EU has received yet another incentive for its development as an economic and political organisation with potential interests in the strategic sphere.

The difference of approach of the leading EU countries and the US to building relations with the nations of Central and Eastern Europe and, notably, with Russia follows from Western Europe’s greater interest in a stabilised situation in the East and from the greater dependence of the EU on eventual developments on FSU territory. In the event of further disintegration and chaos, Western Europe would stand more to lose than the US, but in the event of a successful and relatively fast advance of Russia and other CIS countries towards liberal democracy and a market economy, Western Europe would stand more to gain, too, than the United States.

However, the purely military-political possibilities of the EU on the territory of the former Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe will remain rather limited in the foreseeable future. It can be theoretically surmised that the European Community, using the existing WEU mechanisms, can - speaking above all of ‘low-intensity conflicts’ in the East - try to go it alone in creating a collective security system on the
continent and thus inserting their security and defence policies into the integration process. The process of the eastward extension of the EU’s ‘zone of responsibility’ would in that case go in parallel with the integration of new members into the Community’s economic structures and would perhaps even outpace economic integration. NATO would in that case be replaced by a treaty between the EU, including, accordingly, a reformed WEU, and the US and Canada, with American nuclear guarantees preserved.

But such a prospect is still no more than a theoretical presumption. Even if you leave aside the political aspects of the problem (in fact over the past year the EU has demonstrated an obvious unwillingness to speed up its ‘enlargement’, through ‘deeper involvement’, let alone assume any functions whatsoever of assuring security in the East), the prospects for West-European integration in the military field are most doubtful. The point is that any form of West-European integration in the military field, created to replace NATO, will inevitably have to possess so important an attribute as an ability to control and contain or at least to counterbalance the power of a united Germany. Yet it is obvious that without the American political, economic and military potential, this task is practically unsolvable. There are just no economic counterweights to Germany in Europe and, consequently, no political balance. Therefore, a Europe excluding the US is bound to be a ‘German’ Europe, which is unacceptable even to the most fervent partisans of the idea of a ‘Europeanised’ security system on the continent.

Besides, NATO does already have structures, within its framework, enabling an assured solution of this problem - an integrated command and the Bundeswehr under its control - while the WEU would have to build such structures from scratch and do so under constant pressure from a greatly strengthened Germany. So the odds are that the WEU will soon be ‘frozen’ again and will have no particular part to play in establishing a new European order (unless, of course, Germany tries to galvanise it for her own ends).

The possible limits of the EU’s eastward extension is a more essential, if more distant, issue. For all the distinctions in the existing viewpoints, the overwhelming majority of politicians and analysts foresee no possibility of Russia’s integration in the EU even as a rather remote prospect. The argument is mostly about whether it is the former western border of the USSR or the present western border of the Russian Federation that will become the EU’s eastern frontier. By most forecasts, the EU will perhaps have up to three new members by the year 2000, Switzerland, Norway and Malta. In the subsequent stage, which may well cover the opening decade
of the 21st century, the EU will have incorporated Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Later on EU membership may be enlarged to 25 or 30. But even in that perspective it is only the Baltic countries, of all the post-Soviet republics, that will have a chance of being admitted. Accordingly, there will arise the potential problem of Russia’s marginalisation in the future Europe and its negative consequences for European security.

Some authors suggest that the way to compensate for keeping Russia out of the EU institutions must be by letting it join the G-7 meetings. Once a fully fledged member of this group of the world’s leading industrialised nations, Russia will take part in the discussion of current economic and political problems, working out concerted anti-crisis solutions and mapping the ways of composing the differences between the main ‘power centres’ of the modern world. This measure, apart from its symbolic and statutory significance, would be of direct economic benefit to Russia, which would be more than ever in a situation of advantage in the sense of access to Western financial and indeed any other kind of aid. In that context, it would be less painful for Moscow to stay out of the EU. Given the success of economic reform, Russia could claim to have an independent integrated group clustered around her, formed of the majority of the post-Soviet republics as well as the states of South-Eastern Europe (Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and a number of the republics of former Yugoslavia).

Yet it would be difficult to count on a consensus being achieved soon over Russia’s admission to the G-7. A number of the present members of this club would clearly wish it to depend on some essential political conditions being met (it is difficult, for instance, to expect Japan to be ready to see Moscow admitted to the G-7 before a satisfactory solution of its territorial dispute with Russia).

But even if this obstacle could be surmounted, such ‘compensation’ would hardly be adequate for the inclusion of the countries of Central Europe or the European republics of the former Soviet Union in the EU. In contrast with the mechanisms and institutions of the EU, the G-7 has only advisory powers. The decisions it takes following a ‘mutual exchange of opinions and improved mutual understanding’ are not binding on the parties involved; occasionally a formal declaration is the only upshot of the summit. The conferences of the Seven are a medium for coordinating the policies of the world’s leading nations, producing a more or less common line which is then followed up through various international organisations and institutions and put into effect through the mechanisms of regulation of the international activities of the countries concerned. So
membership of the Seven is a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, membership of NATO, the EU, WTO and other international organisations.

Besides, Russia is simply unable to claim equal partnership in the G-7 at the present time and in the foreseeable future. The problems it has to grapple with are basically different from those of the Seven; the level of integration in the global economy remains extremely low, while its influence on international monetary and financial affairs is, by and large, insignificant. Potentially, Russia could become a member of the Seven but not before it has become a market economy in the true sense.

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