

Russia Observatory – a follow on to EWG20 (2017)

RECOMMENDATION

Endorsement is sought from the Eurodefense Presidents Council meeting in Vienna in November 2020 for the formation of an Observatory on the EU and the Russian Federation. Following on from EWG20 it would report annually to about intentions, capabilities and events in Russia which are relevant to the future of European security. If approved, ED chapters are invited to propose a member of the Council of Experts providing guidance, and suggest links to members of their own chapters who have written/are studying the topic.

INTRODUCTION

The Eurodefense EWG20 Working Group issued its final report in June 2017, and it was submitted to the President of the European Council; the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; and to the President of the Security and Defence sub-committee of the European Parliament.

The report discussed the long term dangers of the West and Russia struggle in the Middle East and in Ukraine following the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and proposed strengthening existing processes of dialogue and consultation between USA, EU and Russia, cooperating in the resolution of today's and tomorrow's conflicts.

Since then, Russia has continued its involvement in the Donbass region of Ukraine and military support for the Assad regime in Syria. According to a report published by the UK Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee in July 2020, Russia has interfered in the west's democratic processes. It has enhanced its capabilities to exercise influence and strategic control over the (melting) Northern Sea Route through the Arctic Ocean between Europe and Asia. But it has suffered through global warming in the Arctic; the Covid-19 virus; and the collapse in global energy demand and prices. Russia has sought to exert influence by a variety of means in former USSR satellites both in Europe and Asia.

“Though there is no overt ideological alignment between Russia and China today, the two governments share a hostility to dissent, deep suspicion of Western interference and a strong desire to impose tighter controls over their own societies.” – Wall Street Journal 2019. President Putin has moved to change the Russian constitution to extend his term(s) in office, as has President Xi. Is their mutual taste for adventurism equally a cloak for their domestic uncertainty?

But this year the EU has shown that it is prepared to go beyond rhetoric when it feels that a strong message needs to be transmitted. In October it imposed sanctions on six individuals and a Research Institute it believes were involved in the poisoning of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny. They are some of the highest-ranking officials in Russia, including the head of domestic intelligence services, a deputy government minister and a deputy chief of staff in President Vladimir Putin's office.

PROPOSAL AND MANDATE

It is therefore proposed by ED-FR and ED-UK that, in conjunction with the existing Arctic ICE Observatory, a Russia ICE Observatory be established by the Presidents' Council. Its mandate would be to keep under review Russia's external intentions and capabilities, and events reflecting upon them. It would report to the Presidents Council regularly; it would produce briefing papers on related topics, and seek to publish and permanently archive them. (See Tables A and B below)

Policy recommendations would not be published without the endorsement of the Presidents' Council.

Strategic direction would be provided by a Council of Experts. Ingr General Francois Flori of ED-FR is proposed as an "eminence gris" leading the Council, and ED chapters are invited to propose other experts if they wish. Anyone who has published or written on Russian affairs would be particularly welcome.

Tactical implementation would be led by a Rapporteur. Caecilia van Peski, Secretary General of ED-NL, is proposed for this role.

TABLE A – proposed papers include

- Living with the bear next door – the Baltic states Proposed writer : Carlos Vilaza
- Donbass – frozen conflict or glacial annexation? Proposed writer : Caecilia van Peski
- Russian weapons systems under development or deployment
- 2020 in Russia – key events Curated by Caecilia van Peski
- The Russian defence industry
- Misinformation – the new asymmetric warfare. Proposed writer : Greg Rowett
- To the sea! Russia's permanent strategic objective of warm water access

TABLE B – existing papers/bibliography

There is an acquired bibliography tagged "Eurodefense-Russia" at www.academia.uk including:

- The role and responsibility of the European Union for mutual understanding and a quieter relationship between the Western World and Russia (EWG20 - 2017)

The original report of the working group EWG20. Relationships have deteriorated quickly because of a range of short term factors, and the long term return of distrust and ill feeling towards Russia. Inter alia Eurodefense considers it essential for existing channels of communication to be kept open.

- Dealing with Russia, 70 years after the Kennan telegram

Willem van Eekelen, President ED-NL, revisits the famous "long telegram" as an object lesson for the 21st century. The US former No 2 in Moscow used it to explain the background and main features of the Soviet post-war outlook. From this was derived the policy of containment.

- 2019 in the High Arctic (ICE7)

A summary of military, commercial, political and environmental-related events north of the Arctic Circle in 2019. A contribution to the EuroDefence Arctic ICE Observatory (intentions, capabilities and events)

- Northern Exposure : Geopolitics and indigenous survival in a warming Arctic (ICE3)

To address the ecological crisis threatening indigenous peoples in the Arctic region, the Arctic Council, member and observer states, must first recognise preservation of the environment takes precedence over

economic development, argues Joe Fallon. The paper demonstrates that Russia still has “minorities problems.”

- Military presence, capabilities and Russia’s military ambitions in the Arctic (ICE8)

This paper by is VAdm Lutz Feldt (ED-D), Robin Ashby (ED-UK) and Dr Sergei Sukhankin is liable to update from time to time as details of evolving Russian bases in the High Arctic are identified.

- Global warming and the challenges to the Russian economy

With its dependence on raw materials extraction and their export to fund its defence and international ambitions, as well as meet the needs of its people, Dr Gary Busch explains that the Russian economy has been hit by falling prices globally and the impact of global warming.

As well as, for longer term interest

- Night Witches: The untold story of Soviet women in aerial combat

This review by Eli Jude of the 1990 book on Russian female pilots in the Second World War exposes the myth that women cannot be combat pilots

- CP62. Iran's nuclear programme - the Russian position (2006)

An exposition supplied by the Russian Embassy in London.

- M56 The safety of the Russian nuclear deterrent (2001)

How "safe" is the Russian nuclear deterrent? by the late George Paloczi-Horvath
Looking at nuclear waste storage at the Russian Arctic bases.

- M58 Russian military reform (2001)

Despite numerous efforts to introduce fundamental change to the armed services throughout the 1990s, the army, navy, air force, and Strategic Rocket Forces of 2001 would be entirely recognisable to a veteran of, say, thirty years ago.