

# The Eastern Question

Russia, the West and Europe's Grey Zone



Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister, Editors

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and Europe's Grey Zone*

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*Editors*

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

Dramatic developments across Europe's east are testing fundamental assumptions that have guided Western policies over the past quarter century. With this in mind, our two institutions, together with our partner, the Robert Bosch Stiftung, brought together leading Western analysts and decision-makers to build Western awareness, understanding and, where possible, renewed Western consensus on Eastern policy. We engaged senior officials, regional experts, scholars, foreign policy strategists and other opinion leaders in a Transatlantic Strategy Group as well as in a series of consultations in Kyiv, Moscow, Berlin and Washington, DC. Eminent authors were asked to contribute their perspectives, and we are pleased to present their insights and recommendations in this volume.

We wish to thank our Strategy Group members, who participated in our deliberations in their personal capacities: Thomas Bagger, Director of the Policy Planning Staff, German Foreign Office; Hans Binnendijk, Senior Fellow, Center for Transatlantic Relations; Paula Dobriansky, visiting scholar at Harvard University and former U.S. Undersecretary of State; John Herbst, former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine and to Uzbekistan; Linas Linkevičius, Foreign Minister of Lithuania; Jüri Luik, Director, International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS) and Former Minister of Defense and Foreign Affairs of Estonia; Olga Oliker, Director for Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; Constanze Stelzenmüller, Robert Bosch Fellow at The Brookings Institution; and Ernest Wyciszkievicz, Deputy Director of the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding in Warsaw.

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While our recommendations reflect the many deliberations held, the views expressed are those of the respective authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of every contributor or of any institution or government.

*Daniel S. Hamilton*  
*Stefan Meister*

## *Headline Summary*

# **The Eastern Question: Recommendations for Western Policy**

*Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister*

Russia under Vladimir Putin has become a revisionist power seeking to undo the post-Cold War settlement, control its neighborhood, and disrupt Western influence. By annexing the eastern Ukrainian region of Crimea and waging war in other parts of the country, the Kremlin seeks not only to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty but the European security order. The comfortable verities of the "post-Cold War era" are a paradigm lost. The Soviet succession continues to rumble, and a new era has begun—more fluid, more turbulent, more open-ended.

Ukraine is now the crucible of change. It stands at a critical crossroads between a more open society integrated increasingly into the European mainstream and serving as a positive alternative model to that of Putin for the post-Soviet space; or a failed, fractured land of grey mired in the stagnation and turbulence historically characteristic of Europe's borderlands.

Europe's eastern lands beyond the EU and NATO are less secure and less at peace than they were a decade ago. They are challenged as much by their own internal weaknesses as by Russian aggression. Corruption and crony capitalism, kleptocratic elites and festering conflicts drain resources from countries that are already fragile and poor. Their instabilities have mixed with Moscow's revisionism to form a combustible brew.

The greatest gap between Russian and Western thinking is not over Syria, Iran, or other world regions. It is over the common European neighborhood. The United States and its European allies and partners must forge consensus on how to deal with a resurgent, belligerent Russia and with Europe's grey zone before things get worse.

Unfortunately, the chances of that are high. Moscow's aggression extends beyond Europe's east to both the northern and southern expanses of the continent. Its intrusion into Syria has further inflamed

Middle Eastern turmoil. Dangers in each region are blending in ways that threaten Europeans, Americans and many others around the globe.

Russia's assertiveness and wider Europe's tumult come at a time of immense strain on Western countries. A dizzying array of challenges is tearing at European unity and has left Europe's west with less confidence and readiness to reach out in any significant way to Europe's east. Moscow is exploiting fissures within European Union countries to generate uncertainty about the European project itself.

Europe's hesitations are magnified by those of its American partner. Yet Western principles, institutions and interests are under assault. Unity rooted in shared values will be essential. Western actions, while coordinated, have largely been ad hoc responses to Russian provocations. They are unlikely to be sustainable unless they are tied to a long-term Western strategy towards Russia and wider Europe. This strategy should consist of three components.

## 1. What the West Must Do with Russia

Western policy toward Russia must be proceed along three parallel and mutually reinforcing tracks: deterring the regime where necessary; continuous communication and selective engagement with the regime where useful; and proactive engagement with the broadest range of Russian societal actors as possible.

- **Track One:** North America and Europe should make be clear that relations with Russia must be based on respect for international law, the UN Charter and the Helsinki principles, including respect for the sovereignty and independence of Russia's neighbors. Track One should encompass both clear signals to Moscow and independent measures that can reassure allies and partners concerned about Russian pressure and deter Russia from further intimidation. Western states must
  - reject any effort to negotiate the future of the common neighborhood over the heads of those societies.
  - strengthen Western non-recognition of Russia's illegal annexation of the Ukrainian areas of Crimea and Sevastopol.
  - maintain Russian sanctions until full military and political implementation of the Minsk agreements has been secured, and be prepared to increase sanctions if Minsk is not fully implemented.
  - consider suspension of Russian membership in the entire Council of Europe, not just its parliamentary assembly.

- stop enabling Russian corruption in Europe and elsewhere.
- **Track Two:** North America and Europe should be clear that they stand as willing partners with a Russia that decides to invest in its people, build a more sustainable economy grounded in the rule of law, tackle its health and demographic challenges, build better relations with its neighbors, and act as a responsible international stakeholder. They should set forth in concrete terms the potential political, economic and security benefits of more productive relations.
  - Engage selectively on geopolitical issues such as terrorism, the so-called IS, Syria, North Korea, Iran, and climate change.
  - Revitalize the NATO-Russia Council with a narrow focus on arrangements to avoid dangerous incidents.
  - Upgrade where possible Europe's conventional arms control framework via confidence-building measures in the Vienna Document, the CFE and Open Skies treaties.
  - Reinforce the architecture of nuclear security through continued START Treaty implementation, examine challenges to the INF Treaty system, and open or reopen discussions over issues related to missile defense, dual-use delivery systems and tactical nuclear weapons.
- **Track Three:** Western actors should engage as robustly as possible with the Russian people, including with alternative elites, civil society, entrepreneurs and innovators, media and opposition figures, as well as promote opportunities for student and professional exchanges and visa-free travel. Track Three initiatives will be difficult as Moscow seeks to isolate its people from Western NGOs. But Russia is not the semi-autarkic Soviet Union. It is integrated in many ways in the global economy, and the digital age offers many points of access to Russian society.

Efforts along all three tracks of effort should be advanced via close transatlantic consultation and united by a vision of Russia as part of a new Europe, a Russia that embarks on a course of profound, systemic internal economic and political reform and modernization, a Russia that refrains from the use of force, a Russia that does not seek a sphere of influence but develops integration through cooperation and by increasing its own attractiveness. Today's Russia is not that Russia. Yet it is important that Western interlocutors not engage in the zero-sum thinking that characterizes Kremlin policy,

## 2. What the West Must Do with the Common Neighborhood

### *Meet the Immediate Challenges in Ukraine*

Ukrainian society has made a clear choice for reform and for Europe. This historic opportunity can be lost unless Western actors engage more vigorously with Ukrainian partners to stabilize the country. Ukraine must lead the way by reforming the judiciary, rooting out corruption, selling off parasitic state-owned companies and privatizing top performers, supporting independent media and civil society, reinforcing its capacity for self-defense, and meeting the needs of 1.5 million people displaced by the war with Russia and its proxies. Western assistance can make a difference in all of these areas.

### *Revise Western Approaches to the Common Neighborhood*

The region's great diversity makes an overarching Western policy difficult. Nonetheless, some broad principles are relevant across the region. The most pressing task for the West is to help Ukraine make its transition a success. In the region more broadly, Western countries need to discourage Kremlin coercion of neighbors and encourage countries willing to make tough choices for reform.

A proactive policy along these lines might be best characterized as "Open Door, Straight Talk, Tough Love."

- **Open Door.** All countries of wider Europe that express interest and prove commitment to join European and Euro-Atlantic institutions should have a membership perspective. The Open Door is the only principle that can credibly generate stability for Europe. Without it, Western leverage and regional incentives enact reforms will be low.
- **Straight Talk.** Open Door does not mean lower standards. Membership is a generational challenge. This calls for straight talk. First, most countries are threatened as much from their internal weaknesses as from external meddling. Second, closer association with the West begins at home. Countries must make tough choices for democratic reforms, not as a favor to others, but as a benefit to themselves. Third, closer integration is likely to be accelerated to the extent a country "acts like a member" even before it becomes a member.
- **Tough Love.** Societies seeking to join the European mainstream must be prepared to create conditions by which ever closer relations can be possible. The West can and will help. But the states themselves must lead the way, and will be held to account when and where they do not.

*With these three principles in mind, Western actors should:*

- **Revamp the Eastern Partnership.**
  - *Differentiate* between those for whom political association, economic integration and eventual membership is a goal (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia), those who are interested cooperation short of membership (Azerbaijan and Armenia, and Belarus).
  - *Focus on the most urgent needs.*
  - *Offer a “European Perspective” to Partnership countries willing and able to create conditions by which this could be possible.*
  - *Adjust Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements* to match the real needs, capacities and intentions of each partner.
  - *Create More Mobility Options.*
  - *De-link the Eastern Partnership from Russia policy.*
- **Consider new forms of association, including EU associate membership,** through selective extension of the “variable geometry” principle, to keep countries engaged.
- **Develop transatlantic complements to EU strategies.**
  - *Consider U.S.-EU “Atlantic Accords”* with countries in the common neighborhood, joint political statements that can provide reassurance and add substance to Western commitments to work with countries to create conditions drawing them closer.
  - *Consider a U.S. Black Sea Charter*, drawing on principles and mechanisms found in the U.S.-Baltic Charter, the U.S. Adriatic Charter, and elements of the Stability Pact for southeastern Europe.
  - *Deepen NATO’s ties to the countries of the region while affirming the Open Door principle.* Make the Partnership for Peace as substantive as possible for reforming post-Soviet states.
- **Engage robustly within the OSCE.** At a time of military tension and growing possibilities for incidents, accidents and miscalculation, the OSCE can provide a common platform for mediation, dialogue and conflict prevention—if its members want it to.
  - The OSCE is one of the international community’s most important on-the-ground presences in the Ukraine crisis.
    - OSCE members must provide adequate support for the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine so it can focus both on security and humanitarian issues.
    - The Special Monitoring Mission should monitor and report on the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea.
    - Local elections in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk under Ukrainian law and in line with OSCE standards must be monitored

by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

- Western members should ensure that OSCE field missions, ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities can effectively and independently perform the duties assigned to them by their mandates, and are provided with sufficient resources to do so.
- The German and Austrian Chairs-in-Office should encourage energetic expansion of such civil society activities throughout wider Europe. This could include efforts to strengthen OSCE monitoring of human rights and expand OSCE attention to minority issues to encompass newer minorities and refugees.
- **Address with greater urgency the region's festering conflicts** in Moldova (Transnistria), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Armenia and Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and, most likely, in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and the Donbas. The West must be attentive to Russian efforts to use these conflicts to influence or disrupt neighboring countries. The OSCE should make an effort to provide fresh impetus for the Nagorno-Karabakh peace negotiations in the OSCE Minsk Group, and establish a status-neutral field presence in Georgia with access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

### 3. What the West Must Do for Itself

Eastern policy begins at home. The best way the United States and its European partners can act together vis-a-vis Europe's east is by getting their respective acts together in the West. Putin's challenge is as much about the West as it is about Russia. The more people in Western societies feel secure about their own prospects, the more confident they will be about reaching out to those in wider Europe. And the more robust our community, the better the odds that the people of wider Europe will find the courage they will need to make hard choices for reform.

In short, while we must deal with Russia realistically, and craft more proactive efforts with the countries of the common neighborhood, there is also much we must do for ourselves.

- **NATO: In Area or In Trouble.** NATO's old mantra was "out of area or out of business." Today's mantra must be "in area or in trouble."
- **Full Spectrum Deterrence.** Deterrence has become more complicated and its scope much broader than during the Cold War. NATO allies and partners face an authoritarian challenge from Russia to their east and

extremist challenges to their south. Full Spectrum Deterrence requires a mix of tried, true and new instruments that can be applied 360 degrees around NATO's borders. NATO has taken some steps, but more are needed.

- *Enhance U.S. presence and participation in European defense and deterrence.* The Obama Administration's intent to increase European Reassurance Initiative funding by \$3.4 billion is an important step.
- *Enhance defense and deterrence in NATO's east, including forward deployment of NATO multinational forces in the Baltic region on a rotational basis.*
- *Strengthen NATO's Conventional and Special Operations Forces.*
- *Meet Russia's growing anti-access area denial challenge.*
- *Revise the Alliance Maritime Strategy* to better focus alliance efforts on collective defense and deterrence in the maritime domain.
- *No excuses burden-sharing.* The United States continues to fund about 70 percent of NATO's expenditures. Increased contributions from member states are essential.
- **Make use of Partnerships.**
  - *Sweden and Finland should become Premier Interoperable Partners (PIP) of NATO*, a new top-tier designation for high-performing partners.
  - *Extend Nordic Baltic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO) to the Baltic states.*
- **Maximize Resilience.** Critical arteries underpinning and linking free societies are vulnerable to disruption by terrorists, energy cartels, illicit traffickers, cyber-hackers, internet trolls and "little green men." Governments accustomed to protecting their territories must now also focus on protecting their connectedness.
  - *NATO allies should each make a Pledge on National Resilience* at the 2016 Warsaw Summit pursuant to Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty
  - *Make Resilience a Core Task of NATO.*
    - *Develop Resilience Support Teams*, small operational units that could offer support to NATO members' national authorities.
    - *Increase support to NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence and its Strategic Communications Command.*
  - *Reinforce NATO's pledge with a U.S.-EU Solidarity Pledge*, a joint political declaration that each partner shall act in a spirit of solidarity—refusing to remain passive—if either is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster, and shall work to prevent terrorist threats to either partner; protect democratic institutions and

civilian populations from terrorist attack; and assist the other, in its territory, at the request of its political authorities, in the event of a terrorist attack, natural or man-made disaster.

- ***Project resilience forward.*** North American and European leaders should identify—very publicly—the resiliency of their societies with that of others, including those beyond the EU and NATO, and share strategies and procedures to improve societal resilience to corruption, psychological and information warfare, and intentional or natural disruptions to cyber, financial and energy networks and other dynamic infrastructures, focusing both on prevention but also response. Forward resilience would also enhance joint capacity to defend against threats to interconnected domestic economies and societies and resist Russian efforts to exploit weaknesses of these societies to disrupt and keep them under its influence.
- **Take action again Western enablers of Kremlin operatives and eastern oligarchs.** Despite Western efforts to blunt Putin's aggression and tackle east European corruption, many Western institutions and countries enable those activities through legal loopholes, tax havens, shell companies and lax law enforcement of anti-corruption laws at home, or through their own activities in eastern countries.
- **Develop a more strategic approach to energy.**
  - *Enforce the EU's Third Energy Package and rules governing the Energy Community.*
  - *Facilitate greater U.S. energy supplies to Europe.*
  - *Invest in North-South infrastructure in Europe* stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic. Integrate Ukraine and Moldova into the corridor.
  - *Review plans for building a North Stream II* pipeline to ensure they correspond to basic principles underpinning the EU's 3rd energy package or the Energy Union.
  - *Encourage Turkey to join the Energy Community.*

# Table of Contents

<b>Preface and Acknowledgements</b> .....	v
Headline Summary	
<b>The Eastern Question: Recommendations for Western Policy</b> .....	vii
<i>Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister</i>	
<b>Section I</b>	
<b>East and West in a New Era</b>	
Introduction .....	3
<b>The New Era</b>	
<i>Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister</i>	
Chapter 1 .....	9
<b>Eastern Challenges</b>	
<i>Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister</i>	
Chapter 2 .....	33
<b>Western Dilemmas</b>	
<i>Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister</i>	
<b>Section II</b>	
<b>What the West Must Do</b>	
1. What the West Must Do with Russia .....	41
2. What the West Must Do with the Common Neighborhood .....	52
3. What the West Must Do for Itself .....	78
<i>Daniel S. Hamilton and Stefan Meister</i>	
<b>Section III</b>	
<b>Perspectives on Russia, the West, and Europe's Grey Zone</b>	
Chapter 3 .....	93
<b>Russia's Putin and Putin's Russia:</b>	
<b>How They Work and What We Should Expect</b>	
<i>Vladislav L. Inozemtsev</i>	
Chapter 4 .....	109
<b>Russia and the West: What Went Wrong and Can We Do Better?</b>	
<i>Marek Menkiszak</i>	

Chapter 5 .....	133
<b>The West and Russia: From Acute Conflict to Long-Term Crisis Management</b>	
<i>Marie Mendras</i>	
Chapter 6 .....	141
<b>Western Strategy toward Russia</b>	
<i>Sergei Guriev</i>	
Chapter 7 .....	149
<b>Western Strategy toward Russia and the Post-Soviet Space</b>	
<i>William Courtney</i>	
Chapter 8 .....	167
<b>Twilight of the Putin Era?</b>	
<i>Donald N. Jensen</i>	
Chapter 9 .....	177
<b>When Could We See the Normalization of Russia's Relations with the West?</b>	
<i>Andrew C. Kuchins</i>	
Chapter 10 .....	189
<b>Forsaken Territories? The Emergence of Europe's Grey Zone and Western Policy</b>	
<i>John E. Herbst</i>	
Chapter 11 .....	219
<b>A Bridge Too Far? How to Prevent the Unraveling of Western Policies toward Wider Europe</b>	
<i>Hiski Haukkala</i>	
Chapter 12 .....	233
<b>An Eastern Partnership for Peace: Why NATO and the EU need a Coordinated Approach to their Former Soviet Neighbors</b>	
<i>Ian Bond</i>	
Chapter 13 .....	243
<b>Western Policy toward Wider Europe</b>	
<i>F. Stephen Larrabee</i>	
About the Authors .....	259

*Section I*

**East and West in a New Era**

