



# The European Security Architecture and Interregional Relations in the Context of World Order Change

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# Abstract

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The study is focused on medium-term developments of European regional security, which are empirically analysed by looking at the post-Cold War European Security Architecture (ESA). Generally, it is argued that the ESA has developed to increasingly reflect interregionalism between two different regional security orders (RSOs) – the Euro-Atlantic (democratic) one the authoritarian Eurasian RSO –, which has coincided with a broader context of a more dynamic global order. More specifically, it is argued that, before Russia’s waging war against Ukraine in February 2022, there had been significant signs of an increasingly aggressive Russia, which had been progressively using its interregional relations with the Euro-Atlantic RSO to challenge the ESA, including as regards its normative, institutional, and strategic (arms control) dimensions; furthermore, the challenge had consisted in Russia’s attempts to modify the ESA, rather than to distance itself from it, which is consistent with the thesis on the relevance of external legitimisation for authoritarian regimes, including by means of cooperation with democracies. Contrary to some prominent scholarship, the study suggests a lack of potential for regions to play a stabilising role in the international order. The study also critically revisits some recent attempts to re-design the ESA and concludes by offering a general forward-looking political perspective.

**Keywords:** *European Security Architecture, world order, regional security order, arms control, Russia*

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# Contents

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<b>List of abbreviations</b> .....	6
<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>I. Theory: World order, regional (security) orders, and interregional relations</b> .....	9
1.1. <i>Disentangling some concepts</i> .....	9
1.2. <i>Global order and regional orders</i> .....	10
1.3. <i>Interregional relations between democratic and authoritarian regional security orders</i> .....	11
<b>II. The global order and its change: an empirical perspective</b> .....	14
2.1. <i>Democracy promotion as a feature of the post-Cold War world order</i> .....	14
2.2. <i>Towards a more dynamic post-Cold War international order'</i> .....	16
<b>III. The European Security Architectur</b> .....	19
<b>IV. Russia and the European Security Architecture</b> .....	22
4.1. <i>Conceptualising Russia's foreign and security policy: A normative perspective</i> .....	22
4.2. <i>Russia's tactics with respect to institutions</i> .....	24
4.3. <i>European Security Architecture and arms control</i> .....	27
<b>V. Revisiting policy recommendations</b> .....	30
5.1. <i>Attempts to re-design the foundation of the European Security Architecture</i> .....	30
5.2. <i>Suggestions for sub-regional measures</i> .....	32
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	34
<b>References</b> .....	36

# List of abbreviations

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A-CFE	Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSBM	Confidence and Security Building Measures
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EIU	The Economist Intelligence Unit
ESA	European Security Architecture
EST	European Security Treaty
HR	Human Rights
IR	International Relations
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal)
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
OAS	Organization of American States
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OST	Open Skies Treaty
UN	United Nations

# Introduction

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The study is interested in the developments of European regional security against the backdrop of contemporary global power dynamics. It looks comprehensively at the empirical aspects of regional security through the lens of the European Security Architecture (ESA). The study is focused on medium-term developments within this architecture, which, already before Russia's waging war against Ukraine in February 2022, had indicated Moscow's increasingly aggressive posture towards Europe and the West more generally.<sup>1</sup> The security perspective determines a recurrent reference in this study to a more specific conceptual category of 'regional *security* order' (RSO), rather than 'regional order'.

The ESA is considered for the purposes of this study as an empirical case of medium-term regional security developments. The fact of viewing the regional security architecture of Europe as, first and foremost, an empirical case allows for being comprehensive in our approach, and this – in a double manner. First, the empirics of the ESA are compatible with the idea that such an architectural framework is able to encompass a set of rules, norms, principles, institutions (organisations), or other collective arrangements. Second, these elements need not function within one single RSO, but may refer to a *few* different orders and reflect, in fact, interregional relations that manifest via increasing heterogeneity of state positions and actions.

Apart from a normative dimension and an institutional one, the study also addresses arms control as an important tool relating to an inquiry into regional security processes in the post-Cold War period. Arms control is aimed at facilitating and stabilising relationships between regional security actors, notably, by contributing to military balance and promoting greater trust and predictability. However, their strategic functionality is premised on a demanding condition of mutual benefit to and reciprocity between the parties involved.<sup>2</sup> Arms control may, therefore, be considered as serving as a precursor in regards to increasing heterogeneity within the ESA and, thus, tension escalation.

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1 The study does not, however, include a discussion on Russia's waging war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

2 To quote Schelling, arms control involves 'all forms of military cooperation, between political enemies, in the interest of reducing the likelihood of war, its scope, and violence' (Schelling, 1961, p. 723).

Furthermore, arms control offers an interesting dimension, which is directly related to the discipline of International Relations (IR). It may be argued that the IR discipline has been fragmented, including because of (relative) post-positivist ignorance of concepts relating to structure or material forms of cooperation. Arms control studies provide an opportunity to bridge major epistemological gaps between positivist and post-positivist IR theories, by connecting the ideal, normative, and material elements of analysis. Therefore, a discussion about arms control arrangements and state behaviour surrounding them, where such arrangements increasingly indicate, particularly, inherited material tensions, reminds one of the utility of the aforementioned concepts to appreciate the nature of dynamics in European regional security.

Already before Russia's waging war against Ukraine, the ESA had been increasingly reflecting two different RSOs – the Euro-Atlantic order and the Eurasian one. Specifically, the ESA, as an empirical expression of interregional relations, had been ever more actively used by Russia's authoritarian regime, representing and, in fact, dominating the Eurasian RSO of the same political nature, to try to modify the regional security architecture on its own terms. A more dynamic global order and, particularly, renewed power competition had served as a context for Russia's increasingly aggressive behaviour with respect to the ESA. Furthermore, substantively, Russia's attempts to modify the ESA, rather than to distance itself from it, are consistent with the thesis on the relevance of external legitimisation, including by means of cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic RSO, for authoritarian regimes. The reference to the concept of interregional relations helps, more generally, to have a better understanding of the relevance of regional security cooperation to Russia's authoritarian regime.

The study is structured as follows. Section one reviews relevant theoretical accounts, which focus, first, on the relationship between the global order and regional orders, as well as, second, on interregional relations between RSOs of different political nature. In section two an empirical outlook is suggested, notably, with the focus on the nature of the post-Cold War world order and its normative appeal, which is closely associated with the United States' democracy promotion; based on these latter elements, the section serves to substantiate world order dynamics, which, ultimately, implies renewed power competition. Section three zooms in on the ESA. Fourthly, Russia's approach towards the ESA is analysed at the normative, institutional, and strategic (arms control) levels. Section five discusses political and policy implications of regional developments. Finally, conclusions, including general forward-looking political implications, follow.

# I. Theory: World order, regional (security) orders, and interregional relations

## 1.1. *Disentangling some concepts*

The concept of a world order is broader than that of a structure. Scholars often refer to the global order in the context of power hierarchies, which carry an instant meaning associated with a polarity condition of the international system, be it unipolar, bi-polar, or multipolar. Yet a characterisation in structural terms tends to belong to the international system (eg. Allen et al, 2017); relatedly, the global order amounts to more than just a polarity system,<sup>3</sup> insofar as it also includes a given set of relevant norms, principles, and values.

Ikenberry (2018, p. 18) contends, for instance, that the ‘international order is not simply an artefact of concentrations of power’; rules, norms, institutional structures, etc., make the international order more complex than just a simple platform for the exercise of power dynamics. Arguably, on the one hand, the core principles of the international order were put in place at the time of the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648. In 1945, with the establishment of the United Nations, the new global order did not emerge out of nowhere. On the other hand, Acharya (2017, p. 276) underlies that, since the 1940s, ‘there has been a proliferation of regional and plurilateral arrangements, private initiatives, and various forms of partnership which involved governments [...]’. Therefore, in line with what may be considered as a more dynamic approach, the study defines the liberal global order in more restrictive terms – that is, as the world order which emerged following the end of the Cold War.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the notion of an RSO, it can be generally defined as a set of regional-level practises, norms, institutions, etc., insofar as they relate to (regional) security and stability. To, perhaps, mark an analytical distinction between an RSO and regional security architecture, it is worth noting that the latter is a largely empirical category; it is defined by specific institutions and actors, and has specific time-related (historical) references<sup>5</sup> (Sánchez Cobaleda, 2020). Understood in this way, regional security architecture is, furthermore, closely interlinked with the international order, particularly.

Regional security architecture might equally represent a set of collective elements, notably, norms, institutions, and other arrangements (eg. arms control); yet it needs not be homogeneous, as would be the case with a given single RSO. In different words, regional security architecture may

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3 This perspective appears as more comprehensive relative to that of some prominent scholars who, when observing the United States’ move towards bilateralism and the arising challenges to multilateralism, are quick to contend that the world order is moving towards one of multipolarity. That is, they understand the world order in structural terms: Buzan (2011), for example, talks about a ‘world order without superpowers’; Haas (2008) contends that the world order has seen the emergence of ‘concentrated non-polarity’.

4 The study’s focus is largely on the politico-strategic dimension of the contemporary global order.

5 We are indebted to one of the reviewers for a relevant comment which led us to highlighting this insight.

include a *few* different orders and, thus, represent interregional relations that manifest themselves in the form of increasing heterogeneity of state positions and actions (see Van Langenhove, 2016).

The empirical aspect of the ESA allows for revealing increasing tensions between the Euro-Atlantic RSO and the Russian-dominated Eurasian order, which have been coincidental with contemporary world order dynamics. More conceptually perhaps, tensions within the ESA suggest the complexity of the interplay between the regional level and the international one, as Russia, being a regional power and, in fact, dominating the Eurasian RSO, maintains its ambition of global power status. Russia has not demonstrated any attempts of being a responsible global power; its ambition has been rather based on material intentions than those of normative nature. Moscow's inability and frustration to attain and sustain such a power status have been projected at the regional level, with all its devastating consequences, including Russia's war against Ukraine.

## 1.2. Global order and regional orders

Scholarly debates on world order transformation are frequently coupled with analysis of regional orders. A newly-emerging global system has been argued to develop into the one composed of more relevant regional orders. As Kissinger argued, 'the maintenance of world order depends upon regional orders; the contemporary quest for world order will require a coherent strategy to establish a concept of order within the various regions and to relate these regional orders to one another' (cit. in Acharya, 2017, p. 279). According to Bremmer (2012), the second-best option for world governance is a regional approach, based on which regional institutions would be expected to address regional issues but also those having broader implications.

Regions tend to be considered by scholarship as having gained more independence and attained significant political and economic influence at the global level. As Van Langenhove (2007, p. 19) contends, we have been undergoing the 'transition from a world of nation states to a world of states and regions'. Katzenstein (2019, p. 28), for example, talks about the emergence of what he calls 'multiple-modernities', at the basis of which one may find different regionalisation dynamics. One seems therefore best placed to approach these 'multiple-modernities' from a regionally-based perspective.

To refer to yet another prominent scholar, Buzan (2011, p. 3) contends that in an emerging international society, the regional-level analysis has become ever more significant. He observes a 'decentralised' international society, which remains 'quite workable', and promises 'coexistence [...] with some elements of cooperation'. Buzan (2011, p. 3), furthermore, draws attention to the emergence of 'a more regionalised international order' and the ensuing 'problem of regional hegemony'. The author argues in favour of the regional international order which, according to him, is able to ensure security and stability. Specifically, Buzan (2011, p. 25) argues as follows: '[...] regional orders are stronger than the global one, and at the global level there is a well-grounded pluralist international society which is mainly motivated by coexistence, but with significant elements of cooperation around collective problems (eg. arms controls and environmental management) and projects (eg. trade and big science)'.

More recently, it has even been contended that the emergence of a regional world order has already been achieved (Van Langenhove, 2016, p. 127). Somewhat similarly, according to Acharya (2017, p. 276), the emerging contemporary order is unlikely to return to the multipolar world order which existed before the Second World War, insofar as a ‘multiplicity of players matter’ in the contemporary global order.

A similar notion of a natural, if not inevitable, association between the global level and the regional one is also present in Ikenberry’s work. He suggests what may be considered a more symbiotic approach to this association (Ikenberry, 2018, p. 21). Ikenberry highlights the importance of ‘regional and global domains of governance and institutional arrangements’ (Ikenberry, 2018, p.21) and contends that these domains and arrangements are inseparable from a common normative set of principles and values, on the basis of which regional and global structures tend to function.

Hurrell (2006), but also Acharya (2007, 2017) underscore the growing importance of regional orders by focusing specifically on institutions. They conceptualise regional institutions and, by extension, regional orders as stabilising forces of world order dynamics. For Hurrell (2006, p. 6), institutions serve to diffuse norms internationally; this process, consequently, permits distinctive regional orders to share the same norms and principles, as well as to have similarly-functioning institutions of their own. Discussing regional institutions, Acharya (2017, p. 276) argues that they are as important as great powers or nation states. He observes that ‘many regional organisations share normative concerns about peace and justice and deserve their space in any meaningful scheme for global order’ (Acharya, 2017, p. 283). Ultimately, such shared normative concerns are able to serve as stabilising factors when it comes to a multi-order world system (Acharya, 2017, p. 276).

### *1.3. Interregional relations between democratic and authoritarian regional security orders*

The idea of coexistence of regions or, similarly, the notion of proximity between regional orders point to another related concept which has not been studied extensively. This concept is the one of interregional relations. Interregional relations have been defined as ‘processes and structures of interaction between two or more actors that do not belong to the same region and that are states, regional organisations or NGOs that claim or are seen to speak for region’ (Van Langenhove, 2016, p. 93). This definition is broad enough to encompass diverse analytical categories, including RSOs. Importantly, theoretical work on interregional relations helps to provide a better understanding of the relevance of regional security cooperation for Russia and of the manner in which this cooperation increasingly served the regime’s interests.

Scholars analysing regional orders in general usually do not pay sufficient attention to interregional relations. Interregionalism tends to be studied with a particular focus on either economic regionalisation (Rees, 1997) or EU-centred interregionalism (Ranald, 1999; Plank, 2017). In some cases, interregional relations are conceptualised as an ‘extension of regional cooperation’ (eg. Gamble and Payne, 2003, p. 53); Söderbaum et al (2005), for instance, specifically consider the EU as a result of interregional relations. Indeed, most of the studies interested in interregional relations address the EU’s cooperation with other regional institutions.

There is, however, another strand of literature featuring interregionalism, which looks at relations between authoritarian and democratic regional orders. Significantly, authoritarian governments that compose an authoritarian regional order tend to use regional cooperation and regional organisations with the aim of ensuring legitimacy of their internal regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Söderbaum, 2010; Börzel, 2016; Libman and Vinokurov, 2018; Pak et al, 2020). Regional institutions of strictly authoritarian (or semi-authoritarian) states oppose democracy promotion, as it puts in question the legitimacy of their own national regimes (Acharya and Jonhston, 2007). Focusing on regionalisation in Africa, for instance, Söderbaum (2010, p.6) argues that regionalism is used as a means ‘to strengthen the status, legitimacy and the general interests of the political regime (rather than the nation-state per se)’.

A similar idea is also expressed by Van Langengove (2016). According to him (Van Langenhove, 2016, p. 93), interregional relations justify and enhance the existence of a concerned region (or regions), including by legitimising the very regimes of the concerned states, which is particularly important for authoritarian regimes. Schatz (2009, p. 217) notes that the former president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, ‘broadly linked state legitimacy with international ties’; more concretely, for instance, Kazakhstan’s application for the OSCE [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe] chairmanship in 2009 ‘was consistent with the state’s narrative about its commitment to human rights and diplomacy’ (Schatz, 2009, p. 211). Pak et al (2020, p. 379), similarly, observe that Nazarbayev ‘frequently travelled to the West, encouraged establishment of foreign embassies, and proposed peace and security arrangements – all to convey Kazakhstan’s integration into and cooperation with international society’.

RSOs that are composed of democratic states, the most prominent example of which, historically, being the Euro-Atlantic RSO, do not need external legitimisation, insofar as their legitimacy is ensured at the national level. On the contrary, ‘autocracies and ‘their’ regional organisations are more desperate to augment their status and legitimacy at national and international levels’ (Izotov and Obydenkova, 2021, p. 152), including and in particular by external means. External regime legitimisation is ‘used to acquire international support, which further [strengthens] internal political systems’ (Pak et al, 2020, p. 378). Such legitimisation is not linked to any specific field of cooperation; on the contrary, it seems to command a broad policy approach, including regional cooperation on security issues.

The Eurasian RSO belongs to the category of authoritarian RSOs. Libman (2019), in particular, describes the outlook of the Russian regime’s external policy in terms of ‘authoritarian regionalism’ (eg. Libman and Obydenkova, 2018), which extends to ‘Eurasian regionalism’ and, specifically, its ‘new independent nation states’ – that is, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia itself, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (Libman, 2019, p. 131; also see Libman, 2020). These countries, including Russia, compose the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and share their own institutions, notably the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Libman’s insights are consistent with those of Kotkin’s (2017), who contends that the reality of Eurasia is the one of a political project, featured by illiberalism and, more generally, a value system which differs from the one of Westerners, particularly.

Furthermore, according to Libman (2019, p. 131), within the context of Eurasian regionalism,

the concept of ‘regional organisation’ has been ‘downloaded from the global script’, specifically, ‘in a way which allows it to imitate the European Union (EU) as closely as possible’. Authoritarian RSOs, however, do not allow for implementing the idea of an RSO aimed at durable regional security and stability, or at intergovernmental cooperation with strong regional institutions having a common agenda and common principles as those enshrined in the ESA’s normative foundation. Within the Eurasian RSO regional organisations ‘are characterised by a conspicuous asymmetry of power, with Russia controlling the lion’s share of the organisations’ economic and military potential’ (Libman, 2019, p. 131). Based on a somewhat circular logic, Russia’s approach to regionalism in general aims at perpetuating national authoritarian regimes, including their regional hierarchy (eg. Russo and Soddard, 2018; Libman, 2019; Izotov and Obydenkova, 2021).

Apart from institutional emulation from the EU, interregional cooperation with democracies is an important part of legitimisation strategy of authoritarian regimes of the Eurasian RSO. They expect that bilateral and regional-level international relations serve as a source of support and acceptance to legitimise their regimes, which are otherwise characterised by unlawful behaviour, repressions, as well as internal or even external aggression (notably, Russia’s aggression in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, as well as Russia’s war against Ukraine in 2022).

However, emboldened and (or) strengthened by externally-gained legitimacy, as well as by their cooperation within their own RSO,<sup>6</sup> authoritarian regimes tend to increasingly challenge democratic principles. This is particularly to be expected from a dominating state within an authoritarian RSO, such as Russia, which may be expected to attempt to modify or even introduce alternative principles, challenging in this way the very basic elements serving as a foundation for interregional relations with a democratic RSO (see Russo and Soddard, 2018; Buzogány, 2019).

These dynamics seem to be able to help explain the substance of the recent major tensions between the Euro-Atlantic RSO and the Russian-dominated Eurasian one. Generally, however, analysis of interregional relations between democratic RSOs, on the one hand, and the authoritarian one, on the other hand, seems incomplete. The referenced literature is based on a substantive perspective, insofar as it fails to account for what it is that makes these relations more or less disruptive at a given moment in history. The study contends that one has to also take into account world order dynamics.

Lastly, the arms control system, which has been crumbling, serves as a particularly good indicator of the Russian authoritarian regime’s attempts to undermine and weaken this architecture and, by extension, the Euro-Atlantic RSO. It is ‘good’ in the sense that, as already noted above, arms control serves as a precursor in regards to emerging tensions, which is due to its strategic functionality of sustaining a military (material) balance between the concerned parties. To reiterate, this functionality of arms control may be sustained, so long as the parties are able to mutually benefit from it. While tensions may also reveal themselves via other elements of the ESA, notably, institutions and normative instruments, these elements tend to have an existence of their own, particularly due to a multitude of actors and interactions involved, which makes them less capable of signalling tension escalation.

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<sup>6</sup> Dynamics within the Eurasian RSO are not analysed in the study, however.

## II. The global order and its change: an empirical perspective

Based on a discussion on emerging challenges to the contemporary liberal world order, the current section suggests an empirical perspective which, ultimately, implies renewed power competition. In an attempt to follow a consistent empirical line, we notably draw, with a focus on the United States, on the democracy promotion as a feature of the post-Cold War order (eg. Lodgaard, 2019) and the recent challenges democracy has faced. Insofar as the suggested challenges had been coincidental with Russia's ever more aggressive attempts to undermine the ESA already before its war against Ukraine, the interplay between global and regional security appears as well-suited to provide explanatory power to appreciate major regional and, possibly, international tensions.

### *2.1. Democracy promotion as a feature of the post-Cold War world order*

The liberal global order has many dimensions to it. One of its main features<sup>7</sup> has been democracy promotion as a way of ensuring peaceful cooperation and co-existence between states, including by means of more efficient and capable multilateral organisations, also as a way of both collective prosperity and individual welfare. Furthermore, the role of the United States has been at the core of the post-Cold War global order (Lodgaard, 2019, p. 5).

Indeed, the fact that during the 1990s and up until 2000 the number of democracies reached its peak (eg. Gunitsky, 2014, p. 562) is no matter of coincidence nor correlation with respect to the role of the United States at the international stage. That is, Washington accounted for a significant part of the causal storyline behind this surge in democracy. Support for democracy and the promotion of it were a clearly-articulated objective of the American political elites, one which recognised 'democracy as a factor of international life' (Talbot, 1996, p. 47), and hailing this political regime as being conducive to more peaceful and prosperous societies<sup>8</sup> (also see Weyland, 2004; Carothers, 2017). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States was able to commit itself much more consistently than in the past to promoting democracy in other countries' political life.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A full account of different dimensions remains outside the study's scope.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that this motive exhausts the United States' interests in terms of delivering support to democratic regimes and engaging in the promotion of democracy, or that the United States did not cooperate with non-democratic powers. The idea here is to emphasise a relatively more prominent and consistent role of democracy promotion in the United States' foreign policy, compared to other powerful countries.

<sup>9</sup> This is, however, not to suggest that there was a clean-cut from the past in term of international principles and practices. After the Cold War, the international order continued to be based on the UN Charter (1945) principles, notably, the respect of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of national borders along with respect of the rule of law and human rights. Yet the fact that these principles became effectively upheld with regard to and in a wider geographical scope (even wider than that of the 1970s and 1980s) provided the post-Cold War order with a different quality of international co-existence.

This is, however, not to suggest that there was a clean-cut from the past in terms of international principles. The normative foundations that are directly linked to the ESA were, in fact, laid down in the 1970s during the Helsinki process.<sup>10</sup> More generally still, after the Cold War, the international order *continued* to be based on the UN Charter (1945) principles, notably, the respect of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of national borders along with respect of the rule of law and human rights. Yet the fact that these principles became effectively upheld with regard to and in a wider geographical scope (even wider than that of the 1970s and 1980s) provided the post-Cold War order with a different quality of international co-existence. Essentially to this quality Fukuyama referred in the beginning of the 1990s to in terms of ‘the end of history’.<sup>11</sup> As for the ESA, the discussed historical context contributed to strengthening its normative foundations.

Around the liberal peace project, which served as an ideological platform to actively pursue democracy promotion, the United States rallied other liberal democracies and international organisations (Parish and Peceny, 2002). The post-Cold War historical moment of the American superpower, to borrow Ikenberry’s (2018, p. 25) expression, provided little political ‘space for [...] alternative [regime] models and ideologies’.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the power of (liberal) democracy was *such* that its principles and the regime it represented shaped the substantive institutional choices of governments and nations across countries. In Gunitsky’s (2014, p. 565–566) terms, global powers, among other things, are, indeed, able ‘to influence the institutional choices of states [...] through patronage and trade, or to simply sit back and watch the imitators climb onto the bandwagon’.

In terms of empirical mechanisms through which the United States pursued its foreign policy in terms of democracy promotion, a few will suffice to mark the point emphasising Washington’s role. Foreign aid provision has been a telling factor, one which captures a mechanism that allows democratic powers to have an influence on the domestic political development of nations. Time and again it has been argued and evidenced in the available literature that the Soviet collapse made ‘powerful donors such as the United States’ more credible with respect to their policy goals related to democracy, the rule of law, or the freedom of speech on the international stage, insofar as ‘geo-strategic considerations’ in terms of any containment of communism had been removed as a consequence of a hegemonic shock (Gunitsky, 2014, p. 564; see also, for example, Bearce and Tirone, 2010; Dunning, 2004; Kuokštis, 2008).

To refer to another prominent example, in the post-Cold War era, the United States was at the centre of what may be referred to as ‘a system for the collective defence of democracy’ within inter-American relations (Parish and Peceny, 2002; also see Valenzuela, 1999; Kuokštis, 2008). The notion of this collective defence regime when it comes to being able to safeguard and promote democracy, importantly, bears the meaning of a group of countries and their ‘willingness to intervene in the domestic affairs of member states [of the ‘Organisation of American States’,

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10 See ‘The European Security Architecture’ section below.

11 It may be noted as a caveat that one should be careful about the interpretation of Fukuyama’s thesis.

12 Ikenberry (2018, p. 25), to be precise, refers in his article to models (and ideologies) of capitalism.

OAS] to ensure the continuation of democratic regimes’ (Parish and Peceny, 2002, p. 230; see also Farer, 1996). This principle, whereby formal mechanisms were established to cope with ‘internal threats to [constitutional] democracy within member states’ rather than external aggressors, was institutionalised by the OAS governments in 1991, and was known as the ‘Santiago Commitment’ (Parish and Peceny, 2002, pp. 230-234). It has been recognised that the ‘Santiago Commitment’ amounted to a watershed moment in the field of cooperation between American states, given that, in the past, Washington had pursued a foreign policy of Soviet containment, that is, without much concern for democratic governance. To reiterate, the defence of democracy was from now on evacuated from any strategic risk in terms of an east-west confrontation (Parish et al, 2007).

To provide another element to emphasise the significance of democracy promotion by the United States after the end of the Cold War, American unipolarity, as well as the subsequent democratically-orientated world order had the effect of linking together democracy and economic growth (Kuokštis, 2008; see also Boix, 2011). Concretely, democratic governance started to induce economic growth, since democratic rule was promoted by Washington as a *condition* for effective trade relations. This was historically unprecedented, which, at the end of the twentieth century, contributed to democracy being closely associated with nations’ prosperity and therefore to its greater appeal.<sup>13</sup>

Despite their brevity, these few elements suffice to underscore the relevance of the American factor in the empirical saga of democratic development worldwide in the post-Cold War era and therefore for the liberal world order. Recent international dynamics, however, have developed to pose challenges to the contemporary international order, which, ultimately, imply renewed power competition. The next sub-section provides illustrative elements to support the notion of a more dynamic global order, with the focus, again, on the United States and democracy promotion.

## *2.2. Towards a more dynamic post-Cold War international order*

The state of play of democracy worldwide may provide a broad glimpse in regards to the empirics of emerging challenges to the contemporary world order. In 2020 global democracy, in fact, reached its lowest level since the ‘Democracy Index’ began in 2006 (The Economist, 2021). While many factors may be expected to contribute to this tendency (eg. the COVID-19 pandemic), the story of the world’s recent democratic decline stands in contrast to foreign policy objectives of those actors, including and in particular the United States, that have pursued democracy promotion. While the study does not adhere to a deterministic line of thought and therefore allows for considering this decline temporary, this pattern is likely, at least in the short term, to strengthen authoritarian regimes, under which a third of the world’s population currently lives (The Economist, 2021).

It in this context, it is in fact the Beijing factor which is most notably associated with renewed power competition. As regards democracy promotion, it has been observed that ‘China’s

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<sup>13</sup> One should be careful not to neglect the limits of the United States’ democracy promotion efforts (see Parish et al, 2007; Weyland, 2018; Krasner, 2020). They are, however, not discussed in the study.

rise is creating new obstacles for US democracy-promotion advocates', in the sense that Beijing increasingly provides non-democratic regimes or 'backsliding democracies' with policy and political alternatives which are aligned with the reward-for-compliance strategy of influence, which limits the leverage which can be exerted by Washington (Smith, 2021). Empirical evidence has been shown of the effectiveness of a democratic push, one which is supported by financial means which can include foreign aid from western countries (Carnegie and Marinov, 2017). With the widening of possible financial sources, the suggested link may prove less effective, especially if the ambition and determination of western governments to push for sometimes-costly democratic or HR-related reforms actually decreases. For instance, Biden's administration has already been criticised for 'partner[ing] with regimes which are geopolitically aligned but less than democratic' (Smith, 2021).

In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of global dynamics and related challenges, in particular power competition, one may also refer to developments outside the Chinese-American dialectics (see Lake et al, 2021). Indeed, Washington's most significant and direct projection of power of the twenty-first century has landed in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars of the United States had 'evolved into democracy-building exercises' (Smith, 2021). With the recent debacle in Afghanistan, in particular, and the effective return of the Taliban, as well as, more generally, a two-decade-long period of violence and socio-political instability, 'the US democracy promotion brand' (Smith, 2021) seems internationally to have lost part of its instantaneous value.

A somewhat inconsistent image of the United States as a credible and effective force which is committed to the promotion of democracy has also suffered from a significant blow from within – because of Trump's presidency. As argued by Carothers (2017), Trump sought to move the United States away from its decade-long 'commitment to actively supporting democracy's global advance'. This policy was one of the country's long-term strategic orientations, one which rested on a bipartisan political agreement.<sup>14</sup> Whether the United States is, as of today, a global promoter of democracy remains a question of degree rather than of substance, especially when considering the fact that support for democracy and human rights remained widespread within the congressional political forces (including under Trump's presidency).<sup>15</sup>

Whether the United States has *finally* lost the ability [...] to underwrite and lead the

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14 As regards Biden's administration in the president's 'return' to what may be considered as the 'conventional' US foreign policy, there are two important caveats to consider before concluding on whether his political and policy contributions will result in having an effective impact, including in terms of support for democracy. First, while the study, as already noted, does not suggest deterministic tendencies, it tries to evidence a medium- to long-term perspective of global dynamics, which hardly allows for considering Biden's presidency as determining. Second, the United States' domestic politics continue to suffer from socio-political divisions. The United States' international legitimacy as the fulcrum of the post-Cold War liberal peace project (or a benevolent hegemon) also rests upon ideals which are related to its own democracy, notably in the eyes of 'institutional imitators' (Gunitsky, 2014, p. 565).

15 For example, the fact that African countries in recent years have regressed in their democracy implementation (the number of 'free' countries based on the Freedom House index in 2020 was the lowest since the beginning of the 1990s) should also be viewed in the context of US policy towards the continent, which, under the Trump administration, did not prioritise democracy strengthening.

post-war order' (Ikenberry, 2018, p. 19)<sup>16</sup> remains equally a *largely* open question. Future developments remain a matter of forecast and therefore uncertain. Yet global dynamics and therefore challenges to the post-Cold War global liberal order that have been arising due to more competitive power politics have been a matter of international geo-political *reality* (Lake et al, 2021). The aforementioned Russia's war against Ukraine (2022), its invasion of eastern Ukraine and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, as well as China's much bolder Hong Kong policy most strikingly attest to the fact that previously unaccepted practices, such as occupying sovereign territory, have become less costly (Gunitsky, 2014; see also Ferguson and Zakaria, 2017).

Regarding the transatlantic relationship and, in particular, the relevant implications of a more competitive global order, for the first time, in 2019, NATO's security agenda referred to China, both as a challenge and an opportunity. Russia's 2014 aggression and, in 2022, war against Ukraine have been definitely perceived by the allies as posing a direct threat to Euro-Atlantic security, including the ESA. NATO has been reacting to the changing security environment as a consequence of a more dynamic post-Cold War international order and has been adapting its defence and deterrence posture accordingly. At the regional level, generally, NATO allies have continued to reiterate the critical importance of the transatlantic link and of the US security assurances for European security.

European security and stability have been and, indeed, continue to be closely linked to the ability of the United States to provide security guarantees to its allies in Europe. In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine in particular, the fundamental importance of a strong and united transatlantic relationship has enjoyed its power of (almost) factual evidence, including in the sense that no other alternative was present. In terms of being fundamental, similarly, the outcomes of Russia's war against Ukraine will definitely change the ESA and, furthermore, will have significant implications for the entire international order.

Adopting a medium-term perspective, the study observes that Russia had been increasingly challenging Europe's security, already before the beginning of 2022. Such ever more aggressive – and consistent – attempts by Russia to dismantle the ESA had 'matched' renewed power competition in the context of a more dynamic post-Cold War international order. The ESA, which is described just below, thanks to its empirical 'density', allows for suggesting significant and comprehensive developments in this regard.

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<sup>16</sup> The authors' emphasis.

### III. The European Security Architecture

For the purposes of this study, the ESA is understood as referring to a set of institutions (organisations), relevant normative instruments, as well as arms control arrangements, which serve to ensure Europe's security and stability. This approach allows for adopting an empirical perspective on security developments which is comprehensive.

Relatively separate strands of scholarship use somewhat differing approaches to analyse the ESA. Aybet (2000), Biscop (2006), Fernandes (2015), and Sánchez Cobaleda (2020) focus on a set of regional institutions, namely, the EU, NATO, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE). A number of authors address the subject of inter-institutional dynamics and conceptualise the ESA as a 'network of interlocking institutions' (Hopmann, 2003; Peters, 2004; Mosser, 2015; Sánchez Cobaleda, 2020).

Another group of scholars analyses the ESA focusing on military aspects of security (Rühleand Williams, 1998; Alcaro and Jones, 2011; Lodgaard, 2019), notably, arms control arrangements and their modernisation (Nerlichand Thompson, 1988; Koulik and Kokoski, 1994; Falkenrath, 1995; McCausland 2013; Yost, 2014; Anthony, 2017; Engvall and Persson, 2018). Relatedly, there is a strand of literature characterised by a focus on conflict resolution and efficiency of the ESA in terms of its capacity to prevent crises, as well as to ensure regional security and stability (Wouters and Naert, 2001; Hopmann, 2003; Sánchez Cobaleda, 2020; see also Schmitt, 2020). The study draws on a few strands of the relevant literature, which also contributes to stressing the complexity of the architecture.

At a general level, the ESA may be approached empirically from the perspective of what might be considered as a set of broadly defined common rules of the road. The ESA represents the core elements enshrined in the documents that were collectively agreed at the European level, that is, the Helsinki Final Act (the Decalogue) of 1975 and the Paris Charter (1990). The Helsinki Final Act, particularly due to its historical context, was appreciated as an 'important positive step in the process of establishing mutually-acceptable principles, rules, norms, and decision-making procedures to reduce the risk of war in Europe' (Koulik and Kokoski, 1994, p. 136), including and in particular by focusing on the notion of territorial integrity and by establishing the 'sanctity' of state borders (Ricard, 2022). The Paris Charter somewhat complemented the first one; historically, it was also important, as it heralded the beginning of a new type of relations between European countries, that is, based, *inter alia*, on the rule of law and democratic principles (Ricard, 2022). The Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter were recognised by all member states of the OSCE. These documents, in fact, were generally based on the principles of the UN Charter, which makes it possible to add the latter beside the other two (see Table 1), despite its international scope.

Referring to the ESA's institutional level, specifically, the European Union (EU), NATO, and the OSCE, the principles and values that constitute the normative foundation of these organisations are very similar among themselves; they also reflect the spirit of the ESA's collective normative

instruments mentioned above. Yet the ESA's institutions are characterised by some diverging membership. Importantly and substantively, on the one hand, the EU and NATO can be regarded as security communities, which have internalised and institutionalised 'a peaceful expectation of change' (Adler and Barnett, 1998), which eliminates any risk of military confrontation within either one or the other 'community'. This is not the case with the OSCE, on the other hand, despite the fact that this organisation as well is expected to represent core principles and norms which are very similar to those of the first two organisations. Significantly, both the Euro-Atlantic and the Eurasian RSOs are represented at the OSCE.

These few latter insights in particular help to stress an important and, indeed, a central idea associated with the ESA. Its objective to enhance regional security and stability and, therefore, the architecture's effectiveness are, in fact, largely predicated on it being a relatively homogeneous (or, at least, tending towards being a homogeneous) space of coexistence between states. This belief or expectation, which is closely associated with the concepts of co-operative security, stands in contrast to the notion of interregionalism that not only allows for an empirical possibility of increasing heterogeneity of state positions and actions, but also provides possible explanations for such an eventuality.

**Table 1.** Components of the European Security Architecture

<b>Normative instruments</b>	<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Arms control<sup>17</sup></b>
Helsinki Final Act (1975)	European Union (EU)	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) (1991)
Paris Charter (1990)	North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)	Vienna Document (1994) <sup>18</sup>
United Nations (UN) Charter (1948)	Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE)	Open Skies Treaty (OST) (2002)

Source: created by the authors.

Beside the normative and institutional dimensions, the ESA also includes a few regional arms control agreements. It is yet another relevant empirical element which is able to shed light on the ESA's (in)effectiveness based on a conceptually different logic, that is, relative to the normative logic and the institutional one. Arms control agreements, which emerged out of the Hel-

<sup>17</sup> Some other relevant bilateral arrangements may also be considered as additional parts of regional arms control.

<sup>18</sup> The Vienna Document is a political agreement and tends to be attributed to confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), instead of the arms control category. This latter normally takes form of a legally-binding treaty such as the CFE or the OST.

sinki Final Act, serve as strategic instruments shared by regional security actors. Collective use of arms control is based on established common practises, such as exchange of military information, observation of and notification on military activities, verification measures, or inspections; arms control, more generally, institutionalises relevant parties' commitment to achieving greater transparency and predictability. This mechanism results in dedicated institutional structures, which are tasked with the review of the implementation of the respective treaties.

Arms control is not limited to exogenous institutional formats or normative regimes. As already noted above, it is particularly defined by strategic functionality, which is both its strength and weakness. Concerning the former, arms control provides an alternative (material) form of cooperation and, indeed, allows for establishing, at the regional level, greater trust among the relevant parties which, importantly, diverge at least from the outset in their security perceptions. This form of cooperation may be considered as material, to the extent that it largely concerns regional actors' military interests, understood in terms of arms balance. As for the weakness of arms control, it is effective only when all parties implement their obligations. Otherwise, it loses its credibility and no longer serves the function of easing security tensions.

The interest in looking at arms control lies partly in its potential to contribute to explaining, within the limits of the IR discipline, the nature of change in Europe's regional security and the related driving forces. As already mentioned, arms control studies provide an opportunity to bridge major epistemological gaps between positivist and post-positivist IR theories, by connecting ideal, normative and material elements of analysis. Looking at arms control and state behaviour surrounding them serves as a reminder of the utility of such concepts to comprehensively appreciate regional security issues. Furthermore, material forms of cooperation tend to be less diffuse and, therefore, somewhat easier to observe than a multitude of interactions and actors involved in institutional and normative dynamics. They may thus be viewed as serving as an early indicator of emerging tensions in the ESA.

Dynamics that are internal to the ESA and manifest themselves at different levels tend to suggest the architecture's increasing lack of effectiveness to contribute to the region's security and stability. One is thus led to question the ESA's ability to contribute to homogenising the regional space to which it applies. As we will see below, recent attempts to re-design the European ESA rest specifically on the assumption of such homogeneity.

Perhaps even more importantly, the analysis of the ESA tends to indicate that, with respect to the still-largely-theoretical expectation that an increasing role being played by regions in contemporary world politics would serve to contribute to the stability of the global order, a more pessimistic scenario seems also plausible. RSOs, as well as their overlapping constructs, specifically, interregional relations, are likely to merely reflect, if not further increase, the fragmentation of the world order.

## IV. Russia and the European Security Architecture

The ESA's constitutive elements had been increasingly challenged by Russia already before the beginning of 2022. Corresponding to different conceptual and analytical levels, these elements – the architecture's normative foundation, institutions (organisations), and arms control – provide a comprehensive notion of regional security in Europe; at the same time, they allow for better capturing Russia's intentions which consist in modifying the architecture.

### *4.1. Conceptualising Russia's foreign and security policy: A normative perspective*

The contemporary ESA, which emerged after the end of the Cold War, had been increasingly challenged by Russia's bellicose foreign and security policy (see Sánchez Cobaleda, 2020) already before the beginning of 2022. This Russian-driven tendency of posing an increased challenge to the ESA consists of many elements, such as the fact that Russia had started violating arms control obligations, used military aggression against its neighbours, or consistently attempted to drive wedges between NATO and the EU. While there is no lack of expert insights arguing that Moscow's external policy and action belong to Russia's systematic and therefore substantive (or categorical) pattern of being (Libman, 2019), to these insights also adding accounts on interregional relations, the study makes an effort to contribute to the scholarly efforts aimed at explaining the escalating character of Russia's aggressive military posture. International conditions allowing for renewed power competition, as well as the effective interplay between the regional level and the global one are important explanatory factors.

Russia's military aggression in Georgia in 2008, its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and military aggression in eastern Ukraine, as well as its war against Ukraine in 2022 are the most striking cases. They unequivocally indicate Moscow's disrespect of the very core principles of the UN Charter, notably, territorial integrity, national sovereignty, and the inviolability of state borders, equally upheld by the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. Russia's actions appeared indeed as attempts to affect the different levels of the ESA. Looking, first,<sup>19</sup> from a normative perspective, the Russian regime ever more frequently engaged into 'cherry picking those aspects of the West it like[d] or fe[lt] able to use and discarding those which it f[ound] threatening or unpalatable' (Lo, 2015, p. 167). Russia was on the path of carving itself out a space within which it would have a special place and an enhanced role (see Schmitt, 2020).

A number of scholars interested in the ESA argue that it was particularly Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014 that served as a 'wake-up call' or 'a game-changer' (Lo, 2015; see also Yost, 2015). This event was a 'game-changer' to the extent that the ESA's normative but also functional grounds were significantly shaken. There was, consequently, an emerging sense of

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<sup>19</sup> For the institutional perspective and the strategic one, see the sections below.

effective *disillusionment* with regional co-operative security (Forsberg, 2019; Schmitt, 2020).

According to Yost (2015, p. 505), ‘Russia’s violations of the Budapest Memorandum [1994] commitments to Ukraine since 2014 – notably with its annexation of Crimea – have provoked considerable discussion about the implications for international order and security’. As a reminder, the Budapest Memorandum committed Kyiv to giving up the nuclear arsenal which was to be found at the time on the Ukrainian territory as a vestige of the Soviet past (Pifer, 2019), in exchange of the assurances obtained from the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom to respect Ukraine’s independence and sovereignty within the country’s existing borders, as well as ‘to refrain from the threat or use of force’ against Kyiv (Pifer, 2019). These assurances were related to Ukraine’s (together with Belarus and Kazakhstan’s) accession to the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and de-nuclearisation. Considering this significant historical context in the case of Ukraine (as opposed to Georgia’s), Yost (2015, p. 505), already before February 2022, argued that Moscow’s ‘violations [...] could have far-reaching implications for security and nuclear non-proliferation throughout the world’.<sup>20</sup>

Based on Russia’s external policy and action, Clunan (2018, p. 56) argues in a more general manner that Russia has been promoting a new state-centric order of its own making, one which is based upon a selective implementation and interpretation of international rules and principles and limited sovereignty for states it considers as the zones of Russia’s privileged interests. Neumann (2016, p. 1398) seems to align himself to a similar interpretation of Russia’s policy and its foundations, insofar as he contends as follows: ‘a ‘Great Power’ [...] has been understood [by Russia’s regime] as being paternalistic, in the sense of being able to lay down the law to other agents, a pluralistic political situation has been seen as being a direct threat to the strong state’.

Adler and Drieschova (2021, p. 361), moreover, qualify Russia’s behaviour as ‘truth subversion’, defining the phenomenon of ‘truth-subversion politics’ as ‘a form of power which is aimed at undermining liberal norms and institutions for the sake of political domination’, or at least at gaining some political benefits (Adler and Drieschova, 2021, p. 360). Indeed, Russia, while seeking recognition of its status within the international community already before its waging war against Ukraine, had been increasingly underlining the distinction between Russia and the West, depicting the West as a different, decadent, and declining civilisation. This dichotomy between the West and Russia, as noted elsewhere, originates from frustration over the loss of Russia’s ‘great power status’ (eg. Schmitt, 2020, p. 924) and has been politically constructed.

Russia has been seeking to (re)gain its great power status in the context of a changing world order,<sup>21</sup> which has already resulted in unprecedented consequences for Europe, in particular, in the

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20 This insight is, furthermore, compatible with a more general thesis that ‘nuclear powers are less likely to be attacked’ (Fuhrmann and Sechser, 2014, p. 921).

21 Scholars tend to depict two different categories behind Russia’s intentions. Generally, on the one hand, there are those authors who emphasise Russia’s status-seeking, which include aspirations to be internationally recognised as a great power, also, to have its military interventions in foreign territories legitimised, and to have recognised its perceived zones of privileged interests; on the other hand, others argue in favour of Russia’s motivation based on security issues (Ward, 2017; Clunan, 2018; Götz and Merlen, 2019; Schmitt, 2020; Götz, 2021). Götz and Merlen (2019) distinguish three groups of scholars: those who argue that Russia is exercising revanchist power which is aimed at changing the liberal world order; those who are contending that Russia

post-Second World War era. Russia's attempts to strengthen the 'great power' strategic narrative were notably reflected in its 'Foreign Policy Concept' of 2013, and in the revised version of 2016. Already before its war against Ukraine, Russia had developed and was actively promoting a narrative of 'zones of privileged interest', which all contradicted the international norms and so were against the normative foundation of the ESA and, therefore, challenged the latter by trying to shape it on its own terms (see Löjdquist, 2021). So-called 'lands in-between', 'front-lines', or 'special zones or areas' were actively promoted by Russia, which was part of Moscow's efforts to gain a degree of 'special treatment' in the region and beyond, this 'special treatment' referring to alleged right for Russia to selectively implement the international commitments and to gain the exclusive right to violate agreements.

#### *4.2. Russia's tactics with respect to institutions*

Russia's approach and narratives also translated into specific manifestations regarding its interactions with the ESA's institutions (organisations). Specifically, NATO and the EU remain Moscow's inevitable institutional interlocutors. Via its engagement with NATO and the EU, as it may be argued from above, Russia sought recognition of its great power status by actors belonging to the Euro-Atlantic RSO. Moscow's relevant efforts were, however, different from those which have been mobilised with respect to the OSCE.

NATO-Russia co-operation at the practical level had, in fact, been suspended since 2014. However, a channel of communication at the ambassadorial level had been retained, with NATO's condition that the topic of Ukraine would be on the agenda, whereas Russia was willing to forget about Ukraine (Schmitt, 2020, p. 932). Russia's foreign policy rhetoric, with its focus on NATO-Russia cooperation, tended to highlight the need to re-establish 'business as usual co-operation'; Russia's representatives were, furthermore, more in favour of this taking place as soon as possible. Russia insisted on the need for the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) to 'resume normal work as soon as possible, since it would be in everyone's interest to resume strategic discussions on major security issues', according to Schmitt (2020, p. 932). At the same time, however, during the strategic-level ZAPAD exercise, for example, Russia was consistently engaged into military training activities against NATO; besides, it was carrying out massive military build-ups and developing the A2/AD weapon systems, which, basically, implied Russia's efforts to seek to ensure its military domination in the region.

In October 2021, however, Russia announced the closing of its diplomatic mission to NATO. In the following month of the same year, it presented two draft agreements to NATO and the United States, while, at the same time, Russia continued massing military forces in close vicinity of Ukraine and in Belarus. The proposals requested legal guarantees that Ukraine would not join

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is a defensive power which aims to accommodate the existing world order to its needs; and, finally, those who mobilise the argument of Russia being an 'aggressive isolationist' (Götz and Merlen, 2019). This third perspective conceives of Russia as playing 'a spoiler role' (Götz and Merlen, 2019) in international relations, namely by holding a mirror up to western 'flaws'.

NATO and that Alliance would refrain from its enlargement policy. At the same time, Russia provided a broad list of other demands, including the requests that NATO would return to the military posture of 1997, put limitations on NATO missile defences, and restrict US presence in Europe.

The nature of Russia's proposals and the surrounding strategic narrative were, in fact, very similar to the spirit of the 'European Security Treaty' tabled by Medvedev in 2008. To quote Hull (2019, p. v), Medvedev's initiative aimed at 'subversion of NATO's cohesion, restricting its collective defence ability, weakening of the transatlantic link, granting veto power for Moscow in the European security architecture, along dominion in Russia's near abroad'. Despite NATO's relative willingness 'to engage in a dialogue on Medvedev's proposal, [...] the existing security architecture [was deemed by the allies] as [...] being both "satisfactory" and "balanced"' (Fernandes, 2015, p. 92). Such a position extended beyond NATO, as it was not broadly debated at the OSCE either. Medvedev's proposal was eventually and increasingly seen as contradicting the main principles of international law and, therefore, undermining the ESA *per se*.

Even if, as already noted, there was much similarity between the 2008 proposal and the proposals of 2021 in terms of what Moscow seemed to be willing to achieve, there was an 'uptick' in tone, which became more bellicose and radical and, therefore, testified to the regime's determination. Russia's actions, as in the previous case of the ESA's normative foundation, also appeared to challenge regional security architecture in Europe, which, this time, rather concerned the institutional level. More specifically though, Russia was increasingly seeking to introduce greater cleavages not only among NATO allies, but also between NATO and the EU (see Freudenstein, 2016), the latter often considering that it tends to be excluded from strategic debates on issues that concern its security directly.

A somewhat more essentialist perspective is also possible, based on which one may contend that the steps taken by Russia back in December 2021 marked, in fact, Russia's attempts to challenge the ESA, if not the entire international order, *per se*. These attempts may be considered as having consisted in president Putin's call for recognition of power status and guarantees for its military superiority. Some scholars have underlined that the Russian regime's legal guarantees requested at the end of 2021 were intended for rejection (Pifer, 2021) and that, in fact, they were meant to signify a more important 'call' (which proved to be the case). Löjdquist (2021) was indeed right when he wrote (in December 2021) that president Putin was considering to renew escalation and, more concretely still, that, based on Putin's estimation, 'the renewed military force [was] a price worth paying to settle the situation once for all and secure a clear and predictable order for Russia with more beneficial rules of the game – a new cold war-type situation.' Consistently, Ilves and Kramer (2021) have noted 'that pushback and strength are the only things Putin understands and respects'; thus, raising the cost for Russia's plans of military escalation might result in real de-escalation and renouncing to a war, according to the authors.

In the OSCE's case Russia attempted to use different tactics, which was something that was related to the aforementioned notion of a homogeneous versus heterogeneous institutional environment in terms of membership. That is, with respect to this organisation, Russia, being a

member state thereof, had a larger field of manoeuvre. Consequently, within the OSCE, Moscow sought to influence the manner in which political issues were understood, which implied an effort to *construct* the political reality.<sup>22</sup>

Even before its war against Ukraine in 2022, Russia had been known for ‘mak[ing] life difficult for OSCE observer missions’ (Lo, 2015, p. 87), in particular, by hindering a negotiation process here or there, and obstructing efforts to resolve conflicts in the OSCE area. Moreover, Russia had continued to refuse to discuss how the Vienna Document should be modernised, which, if abided by, would constitute a contribution to increased predictability and security in the region. Furthermore, Russia’s tactics had included narratives pertaining to its status and recognition but which had been also, importantly, directly focused on the so-called ‘spheres of privileged interests’. The concept of ‘spheres of privileged interests’ had been used more frequently in Russia’s public narrative since 2008, after the Georgia war.

Since 2008 Russia had been consistently using this concept which has wider implications. Medvedev’s EST entailed, in fact, the suggestion to redesign the regional security architecture in a way, which would allow Russia to reserve the right to interfere in domestic and foreign politics of states, where it has interests. Zagorski (2010) evaluated the suggestion to consolidate the contemporary status quo as a proposal for new Yalta or Munich. It has been recognised by some keen observers that it was, in fact, the year of 2008 that already made it hardly possible for the ESA to function because of an apparent schism between the Euro-Atlantic community and the Russian-dominated one, or the Euro-Atlantic RSO and the Eurasian one. Indeed, Hull (2019, p. 32) writes as follows:

‘Russian actions since proposing the Treaty have harmed future prospects of security cooperation with other European countries due to Russian violations of key principles of Moscow’s proposal, Russia’s failure to resolve lingering frozen conflicts with European countries, Moscow’s domestic political interference in Western countries, and Russian involvement in Ukraine and Syria.’

Russia’s intentions did not seem to have altered going forward. On the contrary, the aforementioned ‘spheres of influences’ seemed to have ‘gained in relevance [insofar as] the six so-called in-between nation states – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – ha[d] repeatedly become victims of a geopolitical tug-of-war in the past’ (Douglas, 2020, p. 405). Within OSCE formats, Russia had kept on denying its engagement in the conflict in Ukraine (before February 2022, that is); it had denied the ‘term ‘aggression’, instead referring to the situation as an ‘internal conflict’ (Schmitt, 2020, p. 932).

Russia’s promoted narrative contributed to legitimising an approach which consisted in recognising – or, perhaps even more significantly, in pushing for recognition of – the existence of ‘semi-independence’ or ‘partial sovereignty’. This approach, ultimately, translated into *adhering* to a position, according to which some countries did not in fact have the right to a choice of

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<sup>22</sup> Also see below the ‘Attempts to Re-design the Foundation...’ section.

foreign and security policy and, therefore, to self-determination.

Interestingly, in order to be able to explain Russia's foreign policy vis-à-vis Europe, Neumann (2016) applies the 'Red Queen syndrome' allegory from the seminal Lewis Carroll book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In this, the Red Queen must run faster and faster in order to remain in the same place. This translates into Russia not being able to keep up with the dynamics in European countries belonging to the EU and/ or NATO, as well as in those aspiring to join either of these organisations. As a consequence, Russia has reacted by depicting 'that' Europe as 'the other' in its foreign policy rhetoric, but also in its institutional settings, allowing for a perception of increasing heterogeneity in the context of the ESA.

#### 4.3. European Security Architecture and arms control

As already noted above, the ESA is also commonly associated with a number of regional arms control arrangements. To reiterate, arms control is expected to provide a certain level of military transparency and predictability within the domain covered by a given legally-binding treaty or a politico-strategic agreement. Relevant arrangements are intended to shape a military order in the region and aim to guarantee stability and security. Arms control adds another layer to the analysis of the ESA, based on a comprehensive security perspective. It is expected to serve as a precursor to inform about upcoming tensions, insofar as it can be regarded as a material form of cooperation and, thus, less diffuse and easier to observe, compared to a multitude of interactions and actors that tend to feature normative and institutional dynamics.

The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), the Vienna Document, and the Open Skies Treaty (OST) are three major components of conventional arms control in Europe (see Anthony, 2017). These treaties stipulate politico-military principles and set out requirements for specific patterns of behaviour, without, however, promising to 'drive the danger of undesired escalation close to zero' (Acton, 2013, p. 134). The arms control arrangements in Europe in the early post-Cold War period were based mainly on the 'number' issue, meaning that efforts were made to destroy huge numbers of heavy conventional armaments; later the focus shifted to considering the nature of relationships between countries in the OSCE region (Harvey, 2003, p. 323).

The CFE, which was signed in 1990 and is a legally-binding one, aimed to create a military balance between two groups of countries by providing equal ceilings for major weapons and equipment systems (Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), 1991). The objective was to establish a military equilibrium on a lower level of armaments between the eastern and western countries. It is thus based on the principle of two-bloc equilibrium, and its existence somewhat reflects the mentality of the Cold War.

In 1999, the 'Adapted CFE' (A-CFE) treaty was agreed and signed by thirty states. It was not ratified, however, insofar as Russia did not comply with the CFE flank limitations and did not withdraw its military forces from Transnistria and Georgia, as per the in-advance agreement (Dias Fernandes, 2009, p. 6). As the A-CFE did not come into effect, the parties involved continued to implement the previous version of the CFE.

These frictions already contributed to a certain level of materially-based tension in the ESA, without, however, significantly undermining its normative or institutional foundations. It was, however, not until 2007 that Russia announced its decision to suspend its CFE obligations, namely in terms of cooperation on military data exchange, which is the core element of the treaty implementation. As argued by Dias Fernandes (2009, p. 6), by this move, ‘Russia challenge[d] the treaty itself and [sought] a total renegotiation in order to be able to advance its own favourable terms’. This development may indeed be regarded as an early-warning indicator of the *potential* of regional security to shift.

Russia’s non-implementation of the CFE obligations weakened the arms control framework of the ESA. The CFE, in fact, continued to be implemented by all of its involved parties, except for Russia, which served as a manifestation of Moscow’s willingness to challenge the ESA.

To this weakening of the arms control system in Europe, furthermore, contributed Moscow’s selective implementation of the Vienna Document and infringements of the OST. The Vienna Document provides a relatively flexible tool for promoting transparency and predictability; it contains risk reduction provisions which can be used as meaningful measures in order to prevent regional tensions and conflicts, as well as to respond to hazardous unexpected incidents. Based on the Vienna Document, involved state parties, for instance, have an obligation to notify their plans to organise military exercises (of a certain size).<sup>23</sup>

The Vienna Document has not been updated since 2011, however, as Russia has been refusing to undertake negotiations which would aim at possibly modernising the Vienna Document. Russian representatives continued to block this initiative, underscoring the opinion that the Vienna Document was ‘inseparable from the general situation regarding European security’ (Schmitt, 2020, p. 936). In 2016, Russian diplomats in Vienna specifically argued that ‘the political climate was not appropriate for such negotiations and have since then declined to engage in any update of the Vienna Document (Schmitt, 2020, p. 936).

Besides this, Russia also used to argue that, first of all, it wanted to negotiate a legally-binding conventional arms control treaty in Europe, and only subsequently it would come back to the Vienna Document as a confidence and security building measure (CSBM). Already before Russia’s war against Ukraine, however, there had been no evidence to suggest the existence of effective political will on behalf of Russia’s regime to relaunch negotiations on arms control, which translated into the fact that the Vienna Document and, notably, its modernisation, were ‘held hostage’.

Moscow’s attempt to instrumentalise the Vienna Document was prominently demonstrated in 2016 when Russia invited NATO military representatives to a special tour in Crimea within the framework of the KAVKAZ 2016 military exercises, which would have added an air of legitimisation to Russia’s annexation of Crimea.<sup>24</sup> The concept of instrumentalisation is important, insofar as it is consistent with the contention that Russia did not try to distance itself from the ESA,

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23 For a more comprehensive discussion see, for instance, Anthony (2017).

24 The use of the term ‘instrumentalisation’, instead of, eg., ‘diplomatic provocation’, seems proper here, considering the high security stakes implied by the unfolding of the security situation between Russia and the NATO/ EU allies, in particular.

but, instead, deployed efforts to try to modify it on its terms. This, more generally, contributes to the notion of an emboldened Russia, as well as to the consideration that Russia's authoritarian regime had an interest in maintaining a certain level of cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic RSO countries.

To continue with the third conventional arms control component in Europe, that is, the OST, it came into force in 2002, serving as a confidence-building tool for its members. Notably, this is the only conventional arms control treaty in Europe, one which covers the entire territory of the Russian Federation, as well as territories of the United States and Canada. It provides for the possibility of over-flights over the territory of each and every member party's military units. In May 2020, the United States announced its decision to withdraw from the OST Treaty due to Russia's continuous violations and overflight denials. Russia had continued to restrict flights over the Kaliningrad region, as well as overflights during major military exercises such as, for instance, CENTR19 (2019), and had set out distance limitations along its border with Georgia.

Russia's behaviour in this specific case, similarly, testifies to concrete and increasing challenges posed by the regime as regards the ESA's strategic foundation in the context prior to Russia's initiated war against Ukraine in 2022. The strategic-military aspect highlights the relevance of arms control for looking at specific tensions. As already noted, arms control being considered as a material form of cooperation based on the IR perspective, it is expected to be less diffuse than normative or institutional dynamics and, therefore, to serve as a precursor of upcoming greater tensions. Despite the fact that the above-mentioned EST was somewhat coincidental with, for example, Russia's suspension of its CFE obligations, cooperation in the field of arms control continued to be a permanent and concrete reminder of the Russian regime's attempts to challenge the ESA.

According to Schmitt (2020), Russia wanted to associate the developments in terms of arms control (and other CSBMs) to a broader discussion on the ESA. The discussion on the Vienna Document modernisation, for example, continued to be denied by Russia, whose intention was, in fact, to negotiate an entire regime of conventional arms control in Europe; a broader package was indeed proposed by Russia to NATO and the United States at the end of 2021.

This broader discussion may be argued to have been consistent with Russia's aim to regain its status of a great power and to obtain legitimisation of its territorial aggression. Indeed, one may quite easily argue that challenging arms control and attempts to negotiate new measures provided Moscow with opportunities to engage with the United States on an equal footing and, in this way, to claim its great power status and increase its military power. This, however, does not seem to tell the whole story. Despite the fact that such negotiations tended to provide Russia with a level of status, effective arms control, if abided by, was likely to result in constraining its military capabilities and its military advantage. Yet military capabilities, for Moscow, have also been a significant element of its regional and international standing. This inconsistency may contribute to at least partly explaining why Moscow's behaviour had not provided valid evidence to suggest that the country was willing and determined to promote trust and predictability within a broader community of European countries in the field of conventional arms control.

## V. Revisiting policy recommendations

By the beginning of 2022, Russia's strategy to challenge the ESA had progressed in yet another way. There had been attempts and, in fact, concrete proposals to reflect on modifying the regional architecture also from outside the Russian political milieu. The basic argument for advancing such initiatives was closely associated with regional security stabilisation and, therefore, security gains; yet, in fact, they implied the undermining of the core principles of the ESA.

### *5.1. Attempts to re-design the foundation of the European Security Architecture*

One may start by noting that there does not seem to be any need for arms control or other CSBMs amongst NATO allies or EU member states, insofar as they tend to trust each other. The expectation of peaceful change (Adler and Barnett, 1998) has been strongly internalised in the Euro-Atlantic RSO and tends to stand in contrast to the realities of the Eurasian RSO. As the discussion above reveals, these RSOs are situated at a distance, and this is manifest at different levels of political cooperation. The concept of 'co-operative security', which continued to circulate at the OSCE before Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022, seemed in reality to be only an idea, which had been lacking empirical grounds for bringing the two RSOs together.

Back in 2008, right after Russia's war in Georgia, an event which is considered by some observers (eg. Layton, 2014, p.26) as marking the beginning of a systemic breakdown in the ESA, Russia expressed a wish to review the regional architecture in Europe. It proposed to this end a discussion on a 'European Security Treaty' (EST); the OSCE launched a 'Corfu process' as a result. Russia's proposed EST foresaw to make the CIS, the CSTO, the EU, NATO, and the OSCE parties of and participants in the EST (Yost, 2014, p. 266). Moscow insisted that none of the existing organisations was an 'appropriate [platform] for working on [a] new "European Security Treaty"' because none of them enjoyed the membership of all countries of a broader Europe (Layton, 2014, p. 26). The proposal, however, was not accepted by Western countries in Europe, in particular.

However, ideas around a 'New European Security Architecture' or a 'New Helsinki' were (re-)emerging even after Russia's aggression against eastern Ukraine and annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014 (yet before Russia's war in Ukraine in 2022), as well as despite, as a consequence, a growing level of distrust (eg. Haesebrouck, 2021) between the Euro-Atlantic RSO and the Eurasian RSO. The reason why such ideas tended to pop out into the daylight, ironically, were related to concerns over a possible escalation between Russia and the West, with an ensuing risk of war; furthermore, there was a genuine expectation held by some political elites that cooperation with Russia was required in order to resolve certain security issues between Russia and the West (see Freudenstein, 2016).

Regardless of the merits of this approach, that is, in the sense that negotiating and, eventually, strengthening regional security was a desired objective of most political leaders, it was possible,

already before Russia's war against Ukraine, to view such an approach as very risky. It contained the risk of diverting attention from Ukraine, in particular, and re-focusing everybody's attention on less substantive or even somewhat artificial security issues.

Besides, Russia's intentions did not seem credible based on the following perspective. Russia's strategic narrative tended to attribute the West to the concept of 'the other' which, following this very narrative, challenged the Russian Federation and posed a threat to its national interests. Consequently, the very idea of cooperation seemed to undermine Russia's own strategic narrative and was able to make one doubt Moscow's readiness to commit to a serious strategic dialogue.

Fisher (2020, p. 7), for example, describes Russia's foreign policy as based on 'informal, non-transparent patron-client networks across the political, security, and economic spheres, which are the closest thing to corporate interests in today's Russia'. It may be argued that the same patron-client principle also applies in the case of Russia's perception of international and regional relations, insofar as such a perception is compatible with the notion of classifying nation states into those which are 'more sovereign' than others (consider the idea of 'spheres of privileged interest'). Somewhat similarly, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2017, p. 111) contend that the narrative, one which emphasises Ukraine as a fraternal but subordinate partner, was part of Russia's response to the *identity crisis* which was caused by the fall of the Soviet Union, with that narrative being aimed at reinforcing Russia's position among neighbouring countries.

The concepts of 'the lands in-between', 'front lines', or 'special zones or areas', or other variations along the same line of thinking, these concepts being promoted by Moscow, already before Russia's war in Ukraine were compatible with the idea that Russia was willing to be granted special treatment in the region of a broader Europe. These elements correspond to what has been described in the literature as the strategy of 'truth subversion' (Adler and Drieschova, 2021). In Russia's case, this strategy has been in particular implemented at the OSCE.

Furthermore, one was able to make a forceful argument already before 2022 that a strategic dialogue with Moscow would in fact undermine the very core normative principles of the ESA, notably those of the Helsinki Final Act. Indeed, the 'Declaration on principles guiding relations between participating states' of the Helsinki Final Act underlines the ten following principles, which are as follows (Conference on Security and Co-operation..., 1975):

'Sovereign equality, respect for those rights which are inherent in sovereignty; [...] refraining from the threat or use of force; [...] the inviolability of frontiers; [...] the territorial integrity of states; [...] the peaceful settlement of disputes; [...] non-intervention in internal affairs; [...] respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief; [...] equal rights for and the self-determination of peoples; [...] co-operation between nations; [...] and the fulfilment in good faith of obligations which are held under international law.'

These major principles of the Helsinki Final Act constitute the core of regional and, more broadly, international cooperation. Whether any of these principles can be sacrificed seems to be

a thought-provoking question. Freudenstein (2019, p. 5) referred to the idea of the proposed ‘New Security Architecture’ as ‘an error wrapped in a fantasy inside a delusion’. Already before 2022, he equated the possibility of ‘satisfying Russia’ with the recognition of spheres of influence, and, ultimately, with ‘telling Eastern Europeans that they ha[d] to live in a state of diminished sovereignty because they [were] living in the wrong place at the wrong time’ (Freudenstein, 2016, p. 7).

It may be argued that the ESA seems to have met those great challenges it was increasingly facing from Russia’s side already before the latter’s war against Ukraine. The ESA’s core principles, thus, appear as still relevant. It would be a mistake to link the lack of collective interest in Moscow’s proposals with the war Russia waged against Ukraine, which is largely the result of Russia’s nationalist leadership to dominate – at all costs, including by using military force – against its non-NATO neighbours. This amounts to an ambition which, in principle, has regional bounds and, thus, appears as being lesser than that of seeking a great power status (Löjdquist, 2021) and military dominance. It may be argued as a consequence that this ambition of Russia, seemingly, does not require a sufficiently deterring action from the remaining superpower; however, Moscow’s position, regionally, including with respect to the ESA, may be expected to become more aggressive and uncompromising.

## 5.2. Suggestions for sub-regional measures

In parallel to the concept of ‘spheres of privileged interests’ Russia had developed another narrative about ‘special zones’ or ‘zones of contact’. This narrative had become relatively popular with some think tanks, including in Western countries, and scholars (Richter, 2016, 2017; Zellner et al, 2018; Charap et al, 2020; Douglas, 2020) before Russia’s war against Ukraine. In 2020, a number of US think tanks signed a proposal to re-think US-Russia relations and to engage with Russia in ‘a serious and sustained strategic dialogue which addresses the deeper sources of mistrust and hostility, while at the same time focuses on the large and urgent security challenges facing both countries’ (Gottemoeller et al, 2020). This narrative implied ‘special’ levels of arms control treatment. The idea behind suggests that NATO and Russia should consider risk reduction mechanisms or even unilateral restraint, including in the form of enhanced arms control regimes, with the view of avoiding the risk of dangerous military incidents and unintended escalation.

Yet in reaction to the above-mentioned proposal by a group of American and European think tanks, another group, together with former statesmen, responded to the idea of re-engaging with Russia. Their position consisted in stressing that the proposed ‘stance [...] runs counter to America’s values, interests, and principles and, just as importantly, fails to keep faith with the Russian people as their patience with the regime runs thin’ (Kramer, 2020). Generally, the conviction behind was that restraint, unilateral limitations of military activities, or restrictions on defence capabilities and (or) activities would not contribute to stabilising the situation; to the contrary, such measures would only bring even more harm to the ESA and might lead to more aggression from Russia.

This debate reflects a more focused discussion on sub-regionalism, which suggests concrete policy recommendations. According to Douglas (2020, p. 403), for instance, the Baltic

states – among other geographical areas—are vulnerable ‘border regions’. Such a contention has a substantial effect, as it equates the Baltic countries with those regions that have been affected by conflict; yet these countries are not affected by any conflict-related tensions. In fact, the Baltics do not see the need for any special treatment and regard the NATO territory as one single indivisible entity. It seems, thus, that any ideas or suggestions regarding ‘special treatment’ tend to be rather political, instead of being analytical.

Moreover, there has been a proposal which consists in ‘the establishment of a “Baltic Contact Zone”’, one in which the permanent and temporary deployment of armed forces, as well as the size and nature of military exercises, would be limited (Charap et al, 2020). The assumption that a solution could involve specific sub-regional measures, however, seems to largely narrow down the complexity of the security situation in the OSCE area, while diverting attention from the effective reasons<sup>25</sup> behind the difficulties that the ESA has been experiencing.

Even a cursory perspective provided above allows for fundamentally questioning proposals on sub-regionalism. Already before Russia’s war against Ukraine, there had not seemed to be evidence to support the expectation that any sub-regional arrangements would make the region more secure and stable. Significantly, none of the OSCE member states bordering Russia had expressed an interest in such an arrangement; Russia, by the way, had itself refused to comply with the flank limitations within the context of the CFE. The simplicity of the discussed proposals exerts a power of instant attraction but, at the same time, seems to invite one to turn a blind eye to reasons of non-implementation of arms control obligations, violations of international law, or even acts of aggression. There has been a tendency of analysing military challenges in Europe (Richter, 2017; Charap et al 2020), without taking into account Russia’s ‘internal processes’, either long-term, such as ‘recourse to autocracy’, repression, or militarism (Kotkin, 2022), or short- to medium-term, including and in particular Russia’s emboldened intentions to try to impose its terms in order to modify the ESA. Such intensions, which are also conditioned by world order dynamics, are an indispensable empirical element to account for conflict escalation, including Russia’s war against Ukraine in 2022.

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25 The authors, by suggesting that the effective (empirical or real) reasons are important, tend to convey the idea that those reasons would allow for understanding the complex reality in a more comprehensive manner. Consequently, they should also tell us about divergences in existing normative perceptions. The authors express thanks to one of the reviewers for making them insert this footnote of clarification.

# Conclusion

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The study looks, within a medium-term perspective, at the European Security Architecture (ESA) as an empirical case to suggest the developments of regional security in Europe. It is generally argued that the ESA had developed, already before Russia's war against Ukraine in February 2022, to reflect interregionalism between two different regional security orders (RSOs) – the (democratic) Euro-Atlantic RSO and the (authoritarian) Eurasian one.

By adopting the world order change perspective, the study, however, adds to the scholarly debate concerning interregionalism between democratic RSOs, on the one hand, and those of authoritarian nature, on the other hand. The extant research on interregional relations seems to be well-suited to provide a better conceptual understanding of the challenges that authoritarian RSOs are likely to pose. Notably, while cooperation with democracies provides authoritarian RSOs with external legitimisation of their constitutive regimes, they tend to challenge the very basic elements serving as a foundation for interregional relations with democratic RSOs (Russo and Soddard, 2018; Buzogány, 2019). While the existing research provides a substantive perspective on interregional cooperation, it has difficulty in explaining change, as it does not account for the conditions of the above-suggested disruption. It is here argued that a more dynamic global order, including and in particular in the form of renewed power competition, has served as a context for Russia's increasingly aggressive behaviour with respect to the ESA.

Indeed, the interplay between the regional level and the systemic one suggests major tensions that can be observed while analysing the ESA. Russia, as a regional power and, in fact, dominating the Eurasian RSO, maintains its ambition of global power status; however, its frustration and inability to preserve as such a power status is projected at the regional level. This inability might contribute to explaining Russia's antagonistic and aggressive decisions, such as its war against Ukraine in 2022, which, in essence, was an occasion for Russia to project its military power.

More specifically, one is able to read Russia's frustration in the fact that it had challenged the ESA by trying to recreate it according to its own alleged vision, to instil its dominance in the region, as well as to militarily undermine NATO and the EU, along with the security of the entire Euro-Atlantic RSO. By the beginning of 2022, Russia had been increasingly using its interregional relations with the Euro-Atlantic RSO to challenge the ESA, as regards its normative, institutional, as well as strategic (arms control) dimensions. As for Russia's tabled proposals in late 2021, they

were – evidently – intended to be denied, apart from conveying Moscow’s frustration.

Moreover, the study, by discussing the ESA’s principles, institutions, and arms control arrangements, reminds one of the utility of normative to material forms of cooperation to more comprehensively appreciate the nature of change in European regional security. Also, theoretically, and contrary to some prominent scholarship, the study challenges the ‘universality’ of the notion that regions are expected to serve as a stabilising role in the international order. Regions may be argued to absorb security tensions arising at the regional level and prevent the pattern of insecurity escalating at the global one.

The study reveals that the ESA, composed of two different (authoritarian and democratic) RSOs, is not sustainable. The ESA’s objective to enhance regional security and stability and, therefore, the architecture’s effectiveness have been, in fact, largely predicated on it encompassing a relatively homogeneous (or, at least, tending towards being a homogeneous) notion of peaceful coexistence between states. This assumption should be considered with caution, particularly as regards the implementation of political initiatives and decisions in the nearer or more distant future. In other words, any future engagement, medium- or long-term, with Russia in matters of Europe’s security requires, at its basis, a principled position of the members of the Euro-Atlantic RSO, as regards their normative, institutional, and strategic interests.

This recommendation is predicated on the consideration that Eurasia’s authoritarian tendencies will continue to persist and, given the context of the changing world order, may be expected to continue posing challenges – be it in a shorter- or longer-term. Furthermore, a comprehensive conception of regional security appears to be pertinent, insofar as its constitutive elements at different levels tend to allow for ‘reading’ into arising risks. Considering that the material level tends to resist tension diffusion and, in this regard, seems to be particularly vulnerable to interregional divisions, the relevant principled position of the members of the Euro-Atlantic RSO should be associated in the future with more attention to regional collective defence to deter Russia. Such attention should be given to more demanding conditions and manners on how to sustain unity in applying sanctioning mechanisms with regard to Russia.

The divisions between the two distinctive RSOs are more than obvious. Most likely, it will be largely impossible to restore the ESA that existed right after the end of the Cold War. This implies additional efforts from the members of the Euro-Atlantic RSO to strengthen their security, as well as ensure greater credibility to deter potential military aggression from Russia.

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