

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

How NATO could improve its relations with Russia - Dmitry Rogozin

By Ana Gomes MEP, Vice Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence

Sir,

Dmitry Rogozin makes a bold proposal for "a new legally-binding treaty on a system of mutual security guarantees in Europe." Russia's ambassador to NATO also challenges people to imagine a world where Cold War tensions finally disappear and "Russia's foremost foreign policy goal – a strategic partnership with the West" becomes a reality.

Russian participation is clearly indispensable for the world to confront the greatest challenges to regional and global security. There can be no effective response to international terrorism, organised crime or nuclear proliferation and disarmament without Russia. We also need Russia in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

However, the past eight years have been quite sobering for anyone looking for signs that Russia is ready to take on some of the responsibilities of global leadership which the U.S had been unable or unwilling to perform. Take the example of Russia's decision to suspend participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty in July 2007. There certainly were tensions with NATO over amendments to the treaty made in 1999, but how did abandoning the CFE Treaty all together solve this problem? Why did President Vladimir Putin announce the very next month that Russia would restart the Soviet-era practice of sending strategic bombers on long-range flights beyond its borders? And was it coincidence that Kyrgyzstan announced it was cancelling the lease on the Manas air base with the U.S. shortly after Russia offered Bishkek \$2.15bn in aid and loans? Would Russia prefer NATO and the U.S. out of Afghanistan? Of course not.

I entirely agree with Ambassador Rogozin when he complains that "it is time for Europe to stop acting like an occupied continent and start displaying its own political will." Unfortunately, Russia is contributing to the political divisions in Europe just as much as the U.S. In the strategic field of energy, Russia's self-interested and state-led policy is designed to control Europe's gas supplies and infrastructure for the foreseeable future. That may fit into a 19th century pattern of power politics, but it certainly does not match Rogozin's vision of a future where Russia acts like an ordinary European power working within a harmonious security architecture.

Perhaps of greatest importance to Europeans is Russia's record on democracy and human rights. The Bush years represented a low point in post-war U.S. leadership; they also provided a lot of cover for Russia's occasionally aggressive posture. With President Barack Obama in office, Bush's policies are over. But the fragility of the rule of law, civil liberties and

human rights in Russia are still here. Independent journalists and human rights activists are not safe in Russia and the political system lacks real democratic diversity.

Europe may be far from perfect. But it is hard to imagine that Rogozin's dream of a strategic partnership with the West will come true as long as Russia evades the rule of law and shirks its commitments to democracy and human rights which it has made as a member of the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe.

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