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## Prospects for Russia-NATO relations: The SWOT analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Despite recent changes in international relations and lapse of time since the fall of the USSR, the issue of Russian membership in NATO has been an ongoing fact. Hence, the principle scope of the paper is SWOT analysis of potential Russian membership in NATO from the perspective of the Russian Federation. Through the introduction and evaluation of advantages and disadvantages of such membership in the light of latest geopolitical events in Eurasia suggested by academic and professional circles in NATO countries and Russia, we proceed with identification of fundamental strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that Russia might face. Taking into account such determining factors as the size of its territory, shifting geopolitical conditions in the world, modern understanding of security and a potentially frozen dispute in Ukraine, we come to the conclusion that benefits potentially brought by Russian membership in NATO could be sustained while drawbacks could be eliminated by incorporation of NATO to OSCE and a change in voting procedures of the Alliance.

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## 1. Introduction

During more than two decades in the aftermath of the Cold War relations between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Russian federation, the two most influential parties with respect to European security, have been subject to rapid fluctuations in quality. Despite efforts declared by political elites to stabilize the relations and research community's suggestions regarding elimination of the most controversial issues of these relations, cooperation of the two parties remain in deadlock more often than not. Politically, prospect of Russian membership in NATO could serve as a tool to enable rapprochement between the Russian federation and the military-political organization even though it would bear its related risks and costs.

The main goal of the article is the analysis of the Russian prospect in the Alliance in the light of contemporary international relations. Based on historical and causal, rather than chronological analysis of determining factors of the Russian society, its foreign policy, security environment in Europe and global environment, the first two chapters focus on identification of Russian geopolitical strengths and weaknesses, combined with opportunities and threats that might arise from its membership in NATO. Special attention is devoted to the effect and likely outcomes of the crisis in Ukraine on the quality of the two parties. Partial conclusions will be eventually discussed in the last part of the paper which provides reasoning for a new order of NATO-Russia relations through comparative analysis of the Alliance and OSCE and its conflict with current geopolitical conditions.

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Within Slovakia and the Czech Republic, this issue has been a subject of research of several scientists such as Alexander Duleba of Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Jan Eichler of the Institute of International Relations in Prague, František Škvrnda of the Faculty of International Relations in Bratislava or Ľ. Tokár of the Faculty of International Relations and Political Sciences in Banská Bystrica. Taking into account that the quality of relations between Russia and NATO is one of the most important determining factors affecting European security environment, Russian membership is thoroughly examined by a set of scientists both from the Russian federation and from various NATO member states. Hereby, we would like to highlight contributions of influential representatives of the Russian School of International Relations such as: Sergei. Karaganov, Fyodor Lukyanov, Konstantin. Kosachev, Boris Kozlovsky, Dmitri Trenin, ProkhorTebin and Pavel Lukin, as well as researchers from former Western Bloc such as Charles Kupchan, Robert S. McNamara, Robert E. Hunter, RAND Corporation, and others. In the light of recent geopolitical developments in Euro-Atlantic and Middle-East regions, it does not seem to be surprising that the issue of Russian membership in NATO is subject to more diverse opinions, discussions and controversies in the Alliance than in Russia. On the one hand, Western scientific circles marginally affected by neorealism and American neo-conservatism point out benefits of Russian accession to the Alliance. Russian liberals, known for their pro-Western foreign policy orientation and for positioning Russia as a European power gathered predominantly in the Russian Institute of Contemporary Development, Moscow Carnegie Centre and Russian Council of International Affairs. They were occasionally joined by supportive pragmatic theorists and representatives of Russian political elites, for instance the former Head of the Kremlin Staff Vladislav Surkov and the Head of Department of Political Planning in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, A. Kramarenkov, who are no longer active or whose views are heavily marginalized, particularly in the light of the crisis in Ukraine since 2014. On the other hand, representatives of the Russian School of International Relations who foster the ideas of Eurasianism such as Karaganov, Kosachev or Lukyanov, top executives of the Russian Federation, neoconservatives from the USA and pragmatically-oriented experts from Central and Eastern Europe, question the ideological, technological and geopolitical gains of NATO expansion into Russia to various extents. Furthermore, it is important to note that in the deadlock following the Ukrainian crisis, Russian opponents of the Alliance have gained wider support and their opinions have radicalized.<sup>1</sup> The issue has been raised several times even during official diplomatic negotiations of the two subjects. Shortly after the reset in Russia-US relations in 2009, optimism about further development of Russia-NATO relations was almost tangible. [Kosachev \(2011\)](#) and [Lukyanov \(2011\)](#) point out an important matter in these terms. They emphasized the progress in the mutual relations through comparison of discussions between pre-2009 period and after the reset. Outside of the period from 2009 to 2014, a few, if any constructive and rational arguments were used by either side and debates were led through the prism of the Cold War thinking. Between 2009 and 2014, particularly during presidencies of D. Medvedev and B. Obama, we witnessed a considerably positive change in the nature of arguments reasoning the cases of both Russia and NATO. However, series of interventions by either party during entire post-Cold War era that have culminated with long-lasting crises in Ukraine since 2014 have shown a pervasive lack of mutual trust and how short-lived the reset was, as seen through testimonies of both government entities as well as research community ([Kortunov, 2017](#); [Sushentsov, 2017](#); [Saradzhyan, 2017](#); [Shlapak and Johnson, 2016](#)).

### *1.1. Benefits and drawbacks of russian membership in NATO*

The starting point of arguments expressed by proponents of the Russian membership in the Alliance was the assumption of gradual removal of the ideological heritage from the era of the Cold War. A fundamental precondition of their arguments was the modification of approaches of one actor to another that could result in formation of new order in Europe and in more effective activities aimed at elimination of modern globalised security threats. Taking into account that NATO Eastern enlargement has been repeatedly labelled as a threat to Russian national interests, [Kupchan \(2010\)](#) and even [Karaganov \(2011\)](#) until 2014 considered Russian accession to the Alliance to be the way to ensure peace and to create partnership relations between these subjects. Additionally, they claimed that Russian membership in NATO would lead not only to elimination of one very serious obstacle to current cooperation between these parties, but also to a formal removal of remnants of the bipolar world order. Needless to say, NATO's era of expansion would, thus, be concluded. Bearing in mind significant influence of Russian foreign policy on the politics of Ukraine, Georgia and other Near-Abroad countries, if the proposed scenario in NATO-Russia relations came true, it would be highly expected that these countries would join the Alliance, too.

Leaving aside claims that due to the current Ukrainian crisis and that relations between NATO and Moscow entered a new stage of the Cold War, if the internal security tension on the European continent was removed and the Alliance survived (through Russia joining NATO), we could severely question that the legitimacy of the military-political organization in the post-bipolar world would be strengthened. Consequently, it would be easier to redefine its fundamental purpose. Russian accession to NATO would result in sustainability of NATO control over the security development in the Euro-Atlantic region and to some extent also in the territory of the Asia-Pacific. Due to the above mentioned reasons, liberals believe that accession of Russia to NATO would enhance the credibility of the organization from the perspective of non-Western powers. These facts would most likely lead to increased lifetime of the Alliance, which is, according to Karaganov, currently ensured only owing to the passivity and lack of motivation shown by its European member states. Furthermore, the Russian decision to join NATO

<sup>1</sup> Sergei Karaganov, head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy in the Russian Federation, has always strongly advocated Russian foreign policy interests and opposed NATO's activities, yet after 2014 he called for intentional temporary suspension of Russia-NATO Council until Russia's geopolitical interests are properly recognized and adhered to by the Alliance.

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