It was no coincidence that Russian president Medvedev launched his idea of a new European Security Treaty in June 2008 during his first visit to Germany. This country is generally known for its relatively forthcoming attitude towards Russia’s security concerns, while the axis Moscow-Berlin is traditionally considered by Russian leaders as important for European security. Nor was it a coincidence that this initiative was aired two months after NATO’s Bucharest Summit, where the Alliance decided that eventually Georgia and Ukraine will become members. Medvedev’s proposals actually follow a long tradition of Russian attempts to forge collective security arrangements, and there are striking parallels with draft treaties on European Security forwarded by the Soviet leadership in 1954 and 1955, when Western Germany was about to join NATO.

Medvedev further elaborated on his ideas in speeches at the Evian World Policy Forum (October 2008), at the London School of Economics and at the Helsinki University (both in April 2009). Along the way, and after the short Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 which drew a lot of Western criticism (but conspicuously less action), Medvedev’s tone became increasingly conciliatory and inclusive, as he no longer tried to exclude North America or existing security organisations from a future arrangement. Western countries largely adopted a wait-and-see attitude in response, since the Russian ideas were pretty much devoid of specific substance. Just before the December 2009 OSCE Ministerial meeting in Athens, however, the Kremlin published the text of a draft European Security Treaty on its website. A few days later, Foreign Minister Lavrov submitted a non-paper on related security principles to the NATO-Russia Council.

For the time being, the debate on these proposals has been relegated to a broader dialogue on current and future security challenges in the OSCE-area, launched by the Greek OSCE chairmanship in June 2009 as the ‘Corfu Process’. Russia reluctantly went along, making sure this Process is not the sole platform for discussing its proposals. After all, as Minister Lavrov asserted in his address to the Munich Security Conference of early February, the OSCE has flunked its potential as a full-fledged security organisation and has been affected with ‘amorphousness’ and

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2 President Dimitry Medvedev’s speech at a meeting with German political, parliamentary and civic leaders, Berlin, June 5, 2008 (http://www.ln.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/C080DC2FF8D93629C3257460003496C4).
3 During the Four Powers Conference in Berlin in February 1954, Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs Molotov submitted such a draft Treaty, while a similar draft was submitted by the Soviet delegation during the Geneva Conference of July 1955 in the same format (documents to be found on http://www.ena.lu).
Referring to Medvedev’s then still unspecified security proposals, the Russian Institute of Contemporary Development (INSOR) published a report in April 2009 called ‘The Architecture of Euro-Atlantic Security’. INSOR, led by Medvedev adviser Igor Yurgens, is known as a liberal think tank which regularly comes forward with recommendations for both the government and the president, who is chairing its Board of Trustees. Last January, the institute came out with a report called ‘Russia in the 21st Century: Vision for the Future’. This image included membership of a ‘substantially changed NATO’.

Much of the thinking that went into the study under review is reflected in the ultimate draft Treaty tabled by Russia, although the scope of this report is more ambitious. As Russian security papers go, the tone of INSOR’s report is refreshingly moderate and self-critical.

The authors’ point of departure is that events such as NATO’s air campaign over Yugoslavia (1999), Russia’s ‘suspension’ of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty (2007) and the Russo-Georgian war (2008) prove that European security arrangements are obsolete. Critics will claim that the latter two constituted unilateral Russian breaches of these arrangements, but whoever is to blame, it indeed seems fair to conclude that the lofty principles about European security adopted after the end of the Cold War have not come to full fruition.

Premising their judgments on Russia as an integral part of Europe, the authors formulate constructive positions that appear conducive to a truly reliable and stable Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

The report first gives a general overview of the myriad organizations that make up Europe’s security architecture. The authors describe the Russian crux of the European security matter by stating that its problems ‘stem not so much from an institutional deficit as from a lack of enthusiasm from the participating countries to seek compromise’. The same applies more or less to their description of the OSCE: on the one hand, as stipulated in the 1999 Charter for European Security, it is the ‘primary organization for the peaceful settlement of disputes within its region’; on the other hand ‘there does not seem to be any ground to believe that any decision is possible that would (…) differ from those which are now feasible within the OSCE’.

In short, Russia wants to alter a security system that by and large seems to suit the interests of Europe and the US.

In line with Russia’s professed wish for a multi-polar world, the report touts