NATO-Russia Cooperation and its Soft Security Limits

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Since the early years of the post-Cold War era until the recent Ukrainian crisis, NATO has sought to build cooperation with Russia on a wide range of security issues, including soft security threats. Under the NATO – Russia Council framework, numerous initiatives have been successfully implemented to the benefit of both parties. However, based on an examination of NATO-Russia collaboration on soft security, this article argues that this cooperation has been conducted on a fairly limited and temporary basis. According to the author, one reason for this is the divergent perceptions on soft security and its relationship to political and economic systems. Another reason is Russia's weakness and vulnerability in the soft security domain, which it does not want to expose. Furthermore, cooperation on soft security has been largely contingent on relations between the parties - though to a lesser extent than hard security issues have been. The Ukrainian crisis underlined the primacy of hard security issues and indicates that cooperation on soft security issues will remain a variable of global political developments.

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The nature of the threats and challenges faced by NATO members has significantly changed since the end of the Cold War. As a result, the Alliance has had to transform itself in order to remain a relevant international security organization. NATO has conducted operations out of area (i.e. outside the territory of member states), conducting crisis management operations first in the Balkans, then the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. It has started to build partnerships with its neighbors and global partners over the past two decades. In the post-Cold War era, NATO has increasingly turned towards crisis management as one of its core tasks. Although collective defense has remained the cornerstone of the Alliance, as stated in both the 1999 and the 2010 Strategic Concept, NATO is now focused primarily on out of area operations, which have become a source of legitimacy for its continued existence. Above all, leading the ISAF mission in Afghanistan has formed a central element of Allied activities for over a decade. Along with the strategic considerations of trying to promote stability in conflict ridden regions – regardless of the ultimate efficacy of its policies - crisis management operations have been a major platform for engagement between global and regional actors. Russia was no exception, and the Afghan campaign became one of the most important pillars in NATO-Russia cooperation, especially after 2009 with the launch of the Obama Administration's reset policy with Moscow.[1] Changes to NATO-Russia political relations have always had a direct effect on practical aspects of their cooperation.

Although NATO is becoming a security organization focused on crisis management, collective defense has remained one of its fundamental tasks. Despite the end of the Cold War, and with it the imminent threat of a major war in Europe almost, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet space, and above all Russia, have continued to present major security issues for the Alliance. Although NATO's New Strategic Concept states that NATO poses no threat to Russia,[2] and in 2012, NATO's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said that NATO does not consider Russia to be a threat to NATO countries,[3] the mutual distrust has never entirely disappeared. Recent developments in Ukraine have only reinforced this. The Ukrainian crisis has had a dramatic effect on NATO-Russia relations. In the wake of the military occupation and the annexation of Crimea, Secretary General Rasmussen named Russia a threat to European security,[4] and NATO suspended all cooperation with Russia. According the decision taken by the North Atlantic Council on April 1st, 2014, NATO has suspended all practical military and civilian cooperation with Russia, including cooperation on soft security issues. Only the ambassadorial level dialogue can continue in the NATO-Russia Council. The annexation of Crimea and the ongoing Ukrainian crisis will likely have deep and lasting effects on the relations between Moscow and the Alliance, the future of which will largely depend on the further developments in Ukraine. Within the strategic context broadly outlined above, the purpose of the article is to examine how cooperation developed between NATO and Russia on soft security issues, and to identify its limits, especially in light of the Ukrainian crisis.

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Concepts of Hard Security and Soft Security

Since the end of the Cold War, the perceptions of security threats within NATO have changed considerably. During the Cold War, the focus was on defending the territory of the Alliance from a single visible enemy with symmetric military capabilities.[5] The security perception was state-centric, and it centered on traditional and nuclear military capabilities. According to contemporary security studies thinking these features of security are mostly covered by the term "hard security".[6] After the Cold War, with the likelihood of a major conventional attack on the Alliance greatly reduced, new emerging security challenges became much more significant for the Alliance. This trend continues to shape the security environment. These threats and challenges include the proliferation of WMD, terrorism, ethnic and religious conflicts, illegal migration, organized crime, energy security,

1 Octavian Rusu: Russia and the West: What are the Implications of Putin's Return to the Presidency of Russia? *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, issue: 3 /2012, pp. 46

2 NATO Strategic Concept 2010 – Active Engagement, Modern Defence, pp. 10

3 Statement by NATO Secretary General at the press point following the NATO-Russia Council meeting in Foreign Ministers session, 19 April 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_86234.htm, 20.7.2012.

4 Russia actions threaten peace in Europe: NATO's Rasmussen. Reuters, March 2, 2014 http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/02/us-nato-russia-idUSBREA2109O20140302

5 Michael Rühle: NATO and Emerging Security Challenges: Beyond the Deterrence Paradigm.

6 Bertel Heurlin: International Security. In: Jarrod Wiener – Robert A. Schrire: *International Relations*, Vol II. pp. 177

climate change, to name the most relevant ones. Some of these threats are primarily military, while others are non-military in nature and not necessarily state centric. Those which are primarily political, economic, social and environmental are usually seen as "soft security" threats.[7] However, hard security and soft security has always been closely interlinked. Political, economic, social conditions have a huge impact on national security and security perceptions. Conflicts and crises in these domains can ultimately lead to armed conflicts, either within a state or between states, or between state and non-state actors. Furthermore, soft security threats can directly increase hard security threats; for instance, illicit drug trafficking or arms trade could generate revenue for terrorist organizations.

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However, there are significant differences between NATO members and Russia in terms of how they want to tackle these security threats. This divergence is rooted in their differing concepts of security. For NATO members, especially in Europe, security is a comprehensive and value-based concept, where the division between hard security and soft security is much more fluid.[8] One only needs to look at the core tasks and principles laid down in NATO's strategic concept, or, given that most NATO countries are also members of the European Union, core Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) documents, and the EU's foreign and security policy approach in general. The cornerstone of EU's external relations and influence has always been its soft power. This is a combined result of the EU's lack of hard power on the one hand and much more visible economic, institutional, cultural influence, and the importance it puts on certain norms (democracy, rule of law, human rights) on the other. Although as a defense alliance NATO is still more focused on hard security issues, NATO also has a comprehensive security concept based on the above norms. When it comes to tackling soft security threats and challenges, these principles must be valid both in the domestic policies of the respective countries, and in an international cooperation framework. Of course, neither NATO nor the EU always

7 Moustakis, Fotios: Soft Security Threats in the New Europe, in: George C. Marshal European Centre for Security Studies, Managing the Challenges of Soft Security Threats in the 21st Century Report of the Conference, April 7-9. 2003

8 Andrey Makarychev: Hard, Soft, or Human? Security Discourses In The Eu, Nato, And Russia. PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 129 pp. 3-4.

adheres to this normative approach in practice, but in comparison to other regions or nations, they usually perform well.

Russia and Soft Security

There is a general perception that Russia tends to prioritize hard security concerns over soft security. This is underpinned by several institutional features of the Russian state. Russia's international position and influence still largely rests on its considerable military capabilities. Although the 2008 Russia-Georgia war revealed serious shortcomings in Russia's military capabilities, it still has considerable conventional military power - not to mention its nuclear capabilities, which are comparable to the nuclear arsenal of the United States. Furthermore, the armed services, both the military and other domestic armed services have always been the backbone of the centralized Russian state, and this remains so under President Putin's rule. The Russian government also still seems to prefer the short-term solution of applying hard power to solve various internal threats and challenges which are not primarily military in nature. This bolsters the perception that the importance of soft power in Russian statecraft is secondary. In short, in terms of hard power, Russia is still a major international player, and a major potential threat to NATO because of its military strength. This was only reinforced by Russia's actions in the Crimea crisis, where Russian military might proved to be the decisive factor.

However, the balance between hard security and soft security threats has been more nuanced than it may initially appear. President Putin, early on in his first presidency, recognized the importance of soft security challenges and their potential role in undermining security and state authority. Even the Russian National Security Concept adopted in 2000 acknowledged the following:

> *"The condition of the national economy and incomplete nature of the system and structure of the authorities of state and of society, social and political polarization of society and criminalization of social relations, the growth of organized crime and terrorism and a deterioration in intercommunal and international relations are all creating a broad range of internal and external threats to the country's security."*[9]

9 National Security Concept Of The Russian Federation Presidential Decree No. 24 of 10 January 2000 http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-osndoc.nsf/1e5f0de28fe77fdcc32575d900298676/36aba64ac09f737fc32575d9002bbf31!OpenDocument

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Russia's soft security challenges gained importance over the past decade. Terrorism – as a security challenge with soft security aspects - especially in relation to the separatist movements in the Northern Caucasus, illicit arms trade, nuclear material there as well as in Central Asia are significant concerns. Another significant soft security issue is nuclear safety, with both the civilian and military role nuclear facilities and devices, some close to NATO borders, raising serious security questions.[10] Other non-nuclear related environmental risks generate similar concerns for Russia's neighbors. A major catastrophe in these domains could seriously affect the security of NATO countries too. Other lower intensity soft security issues, such as illegal immigration, organized crime or smuggling also pose challenges for Russia and its neighbors. The significance of soft security was further highlighted in Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020, adopted in 2009.

> *"The strategic goals in terms of ensuring national security in the area of improving the quality of life of Russian citizens are the reduction of social and material inequalities within the population, the stabilization of population size in the medium term, and in the long term — the fundamental improvement of the demographic situation."*[11]

The Russian strategy recognizes that the country's national security is founded on its long term economic development, public security, social security for its citizens, highlighting the importance of the quality of public services such as education healthcare, in addition to ecological concerns. However, in reality, the quality of governance, development and internal security remain significant challenges for Russia. Despite the economic boom in the first decade of the 21st century, Russia is still underdeveloped in these crucial national indicators, and some regions, such as the Northern Caucasus, are especially vulnerable in terms of soft security threats.

One must note, however, that the Russian government has recognized the significance of soft power tools in managing these various regional challenges. Along with the increased presence of security forces, the Russian government has made significant financial investments in the troubled regions of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia over the past decade in order to improve the living conditions of the local population, though much of the resources have been used very ineffectively.[12] To summarize, in terms of soft security, Russia poses a security challenge for NATO due to its weakness and relative underdevelopment vis-à-vis NATO countries.

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Another strategic area, energy security also needs to be mentioned. As a major oil and gas producer and an energy source for many European NATO members, Russia is seen as a major energy power from a Western perspective. Although energy security, as a major component of economic stability and development, belongs to the soft security domain, its strategic significance in terms of Russian foreign and security policy can hardly be overestimated.

Overview of NATO - Russia Cooperation

The focus of NATO – Russia cooperation has always been strategic, encompassing hard security issues. During the 1990's this mainly involved establishing the political framework for dialogue and partnership in the shadow of NATO enlargement and crisis management operations in the Balkans. Following the end of the Cold War, NATO has increasingly turned towards crisis management as one of its core tasks. Although collective defense has remained the cornerstone of the Alliance, as stated in both the 1999 and the 2010 Strategic Concept, NATO now focuses primarily on out of area operations. This has also become a source of legitimacy for the Alliance, particularly in relation to leading the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, which comprised a central element of Allied activities for over a decade. Along with the strategic considerations of trying to promote stability in conflict-ridden regions –regardless of the efficacy of those policies - crisis management was a primary tool for engaging other global and regional actors. Russia was no exception, and the Af-

10 Christer Pursiainen: Soft security problems in Northwest Russia and their implications for the outside world. Finnish Institute of International Affairs – Working Papers, Issue 31

11 Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020, Decree of the President Of the Russian Federation 12 May 2009, http://rustrans.wikidot.com/russia-s-national-security-strategy-to-2020

12 Andrew C. Kuchins, Matthew Malarkey and Sergei Markedonov, The North Caucasus – Russia's Volatile Frontier. CSIS Report, March 2011 http://csis.org/files/publication/110321_Kuchins_North-Caucasus_WEB.pdf

ghan campaign became one of the key pillars of NATO-Russia cooperation.

After September 11 2001, combating terrorism became a priority area for cooperation, and was one of the main factors behind the increasingly close relations between 2001 and 2003.[13] However, the new rounds of enlargement, the prospect of Ukraine and Georgia becoming NATO members, the proposed European missile defense system, and finally the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 issues made relations more tense.

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When President Obama came into office in 2008, the "reset" policy was launched. The European allies also supported the rapprochement with Russia, while Moscow was also open to easing tensions, hence the improvement of NATO – Russia relations in terms of practical cooperation.[14] Again, hard security issues, such as the proposed cooperation on missile defense and increased Russian cooperation concerning the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, were at the forefront, although in the latter, soft security cooperation was also an important component. The vulnerability of many European countries following the economic crisis, the unresolved security problems with deep economic and social roots around Russia's southern borders, the growing relevance of the Arctic and its economic and security implications, revealed the increasing prominence of soft security. At the same time, it has been recognized that in many aspects NATO - as a military organization - is much less able to provide a platform for cooperation on soft security issues than, for example, the European Union. This is especially true for issues directly linked to socio-economic challenges. Trying to channel issues into the NATO-Russia framework rather than the EU-Russia framework may send the wrong signal to Moscow, as the Kremlin has seen this as an act of interference.

13 Barbora Padrtová: NATO-Russia Relations. In: Róbert Ondrejcsák – Beata Górka-Winter: NATO's Future Partnerships pp. 26

14 Luca Ratti: Resetting' NATO–Russia Relations: A Realist Appraisal Two Decades after the USSR. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 26:2, pp. 147

Despite the rapprochement between Russia and NATO, Russia's then-President Dmitri Medvedev warned that the rapprochement was not irreversible, and it would depend largely on the success or the failure of the negotiations on missile defense cooperation.[15] As the prospect of an agreement on the issue began to fade and essentially ran aground, especially after Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, relations have soured once again.[16] Thus, NATO-Russia relations were already effectively frozen before the Ukrainian crisis escalated into a wide-ranging political confrontation between Russia and the West. The tipping point in the crisis was clearly the military occupation of Crimea by Russian forces. The violation of Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty by Russia was met with sharp condemnation from NATO countries. In response to the crisis, NATO decided to suspend all existing partnership programs with Russia, and instructed NATO's military leadership to draw up plans on how to strengthen NATO's military stance in Eastern Europe. In light of the 'hard' security-strategic issues, soft security cooperation has always been secondary. However, this does not diminish the importance of soft security cooperation, not least in the service of confidence building measures between the two parties. The following section provides an overview of NATO-Russia cooperation on soft security threats.

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Combating Terrorism

Terrorism is a complex area encompassing both hard and soft security concerns, and requires specific mention here, since some areas of cooperation cover soft security aspects. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 were the key factor in NATO–Russia rapprochement during the first half of that decade. The United States was facing a major terrorist threats; Russia perceived similar threats from radical Islamist groups involved in conflicts in the North and South Caucasus. Thus, there was considerable common ground for cooperation. The 2002 NATO-Russia Declaration, which created the NATO-Russia Council, put the struggle against

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15 Ibid pp. 154

16 Octavian Rusu: Russia and the West: What are the Implications of Putin's Return to the Presidency of Russia? *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, Issue 3/2012, pp. 45

terrorism at the top of the list of cooperative efforts. Cooperation on terrorism between NATO and Russia is currently based on the NRC Action Plan on Terrorism, which was signed in 2004, and recently updated in 2011 in Berlin. One of the projects was the STANDEX project, completed in 2013, a scientific cooperation aimed at developing devices for detection, recognition, localization and tracking of explosives.[17] The exchange of information and best practices on countering improvised explosive devices has also taken place.[18] Although there are overlaps with the hard security domain, the Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI)[19] can also be mentioned here. The CAI is an information exchange system on air traffic, aimed at preventing terrorist activities in the airspace. The implementation of the project began in 2006, and it was successfully concluded in 2011. Several live exercises have proven the readiness of the system.[20]

Counter – Narcotic Initiatives in Afghanistan

Although Russia's involvement in Afghanistan is a highly strategic and political issue, and it comprises one component of ISAF's crisis management operation, Russia's involvement in counter narcotic efforts in the Central Asian countries is primarily a soft security issue. The project on counter-narcotics training of Afghan and Central Asian personnel began is 2005 with the cooperation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The initiative seeks to build partnerships among mid-level officers from participating nations through sharing of expertise.[21] Russia's primary contribution to the project is the provision of training facilities (the Domodedovo Center near Moscow, the North-West Training Centre in St. Petersburg and the Rostov-on-Don Canine Training Centre) as well as trainers.[22] In 2013, the project was expanded to include cross-border counter-narcotics training. By the end of 2013, the project had trained over 3000 officers from the participating countries, with over 466 officers trained in 30 courses in 2013.[23] However, the pullout of the ISAF forces along with Afghanistan's uncertain future raise questions on the long term sustainability of the project.

17 STANDEX Counter Terrorism Project: 10 Years 10 Stories Anniversary Feature, available at http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/20121123-nrc-10-years-standex/

18 NRC conference on countering improvised explosive devices, NATO Russia Council, available at http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/20121212-nrc-counter-ied-seminar/

19 Nations discuss Cooperative Airspace Initiative progress, NATO - Russia Council, available at http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/20130513-nrc-cai-update-april/

20 NATO-Russia Council holds Cooperative Airspace Initiative exercise, 13 November 2012, available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_91277.htm?selectedLocale=en

21 20 NATO members, Russia, Finland, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan (joined in 2010), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

22 NATO-Russia Council Project on Counter-Narcotics Training of Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani Personnel, NATO-Russia Council Info, July 2011, available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_07/20110802_1107015-NRC_Counter-Narcotics_Project_en.pdf

Combating Piracy

Combating piracy is another dual area encompassing both hard security and soft security, as it involves hard maritime power, via law enforcement on international waters. Cooperation between NATO and Russia has been developing at the tactical level since 2008, when NATO's Operation Ocean Shield was launched in the vicinity of the Horn of Africa to tackle the piracy threat in the region. The cooperation includes regular meetings between staff at the operational level, tactical cooperation and exercises in the theater, and Russia's use of the NATO Maritime Interdiction Training Centre in Crete.[24] A document formalizing this tactical maritime cooperation was signed by NATO Maritime Command and Russian Navy in December 2012 in St. Petersburg.[25] Both parties aim to develop the cooperation through increased tactical information exchange, coordination and technical support.

Civil Emergencies

Civil emergencies present a more traditional soft security area for cooperation. Cooperation in this field began in 1996, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Civil Emergency Planning and Disaster Preparedness between Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations and NATO. The focus of the cooperation was initially on response, detection and prevention of emergencies such as earthquakes and floods. One of the first results of the cooperation was the establishment of the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre. A Civil Emergency Planning and Protection Working Group was also created in 2002.[26] Several joint disaster response exer-

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23 NATO-Russia Council Practical Cooperation Fact Sheet, October 2013, http://www.nato-russia-council.info/media/104666/nato-russia_council_factsheet_final_2013-11-07_trilingual.pdf pp. 4

24 NATO and Russia seek to strengthen cooperation to counter piracy, NATO Homepage, March 27, 2012 http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-38DC19C3-FFF50588/natolive/news_85557.htm

25 NATO-Russia Council Practical Cooperation Fact Sheet, October 2013, http://www.nato-russia-council.info/media/104666/nato-russia_council_factsheet_final_2013-11-07_trilingual.pdf pp. 7

26 NRC Civil Emergency Planning: 10 Years 10 Stories Anniversary Feature. http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/20121018-nrc-10-years-cep/

cises focusing on terrorist attacks[27] have been held, while cooperation on high visibility events is also strengthening.

Nuclear weapons safety is a special area of disaster prevention and response cooperation. Several nuclear weapons accidents and incident exercises have been held over the last decade, hosted by the NRC nuclear powers. The more sensitive aspects of nuclear policy have remained outside the framework of this cooperation.

Defense Transparency, Strategy, and Reform

Although dialogue on doctrinal issues, military reform, human and financial resources management has taken place within the NRC, there has been a lack of substantive cooperation on the issue for political reasons. Command and control, transparency of the military, civil-military relations are at the core of the Russia's political system, and Moscow does not want external oversight, let alone substantial democratic reforms in these domains. With the cooling of Russia - NATO relations, including the collapse of the CFE Treaty, the increased capacity of Russia's military modernization programs, and large-scale exercises returning on both sides, transparency has become a greater concern for NATO countries. The Russian government seems now to be isolating itself from further cooperation in this field, rejecting even limited initiatives.[28]

Nonetheless, a degree practical cooperation has taken place. The parties provide regular briefings on doctrine, white papers, defense programs, though the quality and the depth of these briefings are limited.[29] As a further example, in 2002, a NATO-Russia Resettlement Centre was established in order to help former Russian military officers integrate into civilian life by providing soft skills training. This ran until 2008.

27 Noginsk (2002), Kaliningrad (2004), Rome (2005).

28 An example was the German initiative on a Common Space of Trust (CST), which aimed to offer notification on military exercises, but was rejected by Moscow. Simon Lunn: The NATO–Russia Council: Its Role and Prospects. *European Leadership Network*, Policy Brief November, 2013 pp. 8 http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2013/11/29/11e0c7b3/The%20NATO%20Russia%20Council%20Its%20Role%20and%20Prospects_Simon%20Lunn_November%202013.pdf

29 Ibid pp. 7

Scientific Cooperation

The NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Program was one of the first areas of practical cooperation; Russia has been involved in this initiative since 1992. The program seeks to facilitate international cooperation through Action Plans adopted by the NRC on scientific research focusing on emerging security challenges. The latest scientific Action Plan includes exchange of technologies, methodologies, best practices on counter terrorism, energy security, defense against CBRN agents, environmental security, border and port security, mine and unexploded ordnance detection and clearance, human and social aspects of security.[30] Environmental protection in the Baltic Sea region has been a special focus under this framework, including oil spill management, and the establishment of a risk monitoring assessment network on munitions dumpsites.

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Conclusions

As soft security challenges become more and more globalized, neither NATO countries nor Russia can avoid strengthening their international engagement in order to tackle these issues. However, NATO member states and Russia still have fundamentally different perceptions of security threats and challenges, particularly in relation to the role of the state in tackling and managing those threats. This limits the scope and depth of soft security cooperation. Although there has been wide-ranging cooperation in this area since NATO and Russia established formal relations in the 1990's, the intensity of those initiatives was largely dependent on international political developments, such as hard security issues and major political developments in Eastern Europe. As a general observation, the more politically sensitive the particular soft security issue, the more cooperation was determined by the current state of political relations. As the events in Ukraine have shown, NATO and Russia continue to have significantly different core interests in the Euro-Atlantic region, and hard security is still at the core of the relationship. Both NATO and Russia have shown that they will easily sacrifice the gains of soft security cooperation for pressing political considerations. Whether the cur-

30 NATO-Russia scientific cooperation, NATO Homepage http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/88267.htm

rent Ukrainian crisis will further escalate, or whether the parties will find a political-diplomatic solution determining the fate of NATO-Russia soft security cooperation remains to be seen.