

Study Calls for EU Talks With Russia and Turkey

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BRUSSELS — The European Union should establish a three-way dialogue on security with Russia and Turkey to tackle frozen conflicts and promote stability on its eastern flank, a leading think tank says.

In a report released Friday, the European Council on Foreign Relations said the 27-nation EU must take more responsibility for security in its own neighborhood because the United States has its hands full dealing with Afghanistan, Iran and China and is no longer focused on Europe.

The study says the current system failed to prevent wars in Kosovo and Georgia, or disruption to Europe's gas supplies, or to resolve a string of legacy disputes on the fringes of the former Soviet Union.

The leaders of Russia, Germany and France will meet Monday in the French town of Deauville to discuss security cooperation amid signs that Moscow is giving new priority to improving ties with the EU, including in former communist central Europe.

In a report titled "The Illusion of Order and the Specter of a Multipolar Europe," authors Mark Leonard and Ivan Krastev said: "The Merkel-Medvedev-Sarkozy summit has the right agenda but the wrong participants. We need an informal European security trialogue that brings together the three key pillars of European security: Turkey, Russia and the EU."

The proposed forum would not replace existing institutions such as the NATO-Russia Council or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, nor be a substitute for Turkey's slow-moving EU membership negotiations, they said.

Rather, it could build mutual confidence by working to defuse potential flash points such as the breakaway Moldovan region of Transdnestr, or the standoff between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

The report argues that conditions for such a three-way dialogue have improved. NATO has shelved moves toward admitting Ukraine and Georgia, bitterly opposed by Russia; the United States has pressed the "reset" button on bilateral relations with Moscow, and Poland's fraught ties with Russia have warmed.

Whether Western Europe's major powers — Germany, France and Britain — would be willing to entrust the conduct of security relations with Russia and Turkey to the EU's new foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, remains to be seen.

But the authors said a survey of 250 elite foreign policy professionals in the 27 EU member states, and a review of those countries' national security documents, showed a growing identity of views on security risks and how to deal with Russia.

The study said the "trialogue" should first draw up a security action plan to reduce tensions by demilitarizing the continent's most volatile regions and solving frozen conflicts.

If that effort were successful, EU countries could be more receptive to Russian ideas for a European security treaty as the culmination of a process of confidence building, it said.

Most European NATO members and the United States viewed President Dmitry Medvedev's proposal for such a treaty with suspicion because it was seen as an attempt to gain veto power over NATO actions in Europe.

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