

# 2009 EU-Russia summit: Divisions growing wider?

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

THE two-day EU-Russia summit concluded on 22 May. The venue chosen by Russia, the city of Khabarovsk, is near China, about 8,000 kilometers east of Brussels. President Medvedev made a point on 21st May of noting EU leaders would understand how large Russia is by having to fly so far.

All participating leaders, including Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Czech President Vaclav Klaus, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, attended the summit.

The summit was held in the light of easing tensions between the US and Russia. The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for the first time last 6th March following a decision on 5th March by Nato to resume relations between Nato and Russia. These were broken off after the Georgia-Russia conflict in August 2008.

The EU and Russia are trying to mend ties since the last 12 months witnessed a five-day war between Russia and Georgia over the latter's break-away regions, as well as the gas row that disrupted supplies to Europe in the depths of winter and raised doubts over Russia's credibility as a major gas supplier.

The summit provided a good opportunity for a dialogue on all strategic issues concerning development of relations between Russia and the EU. It paved the way to review many positions and outline new areas for the future development of relations including coordinating efforts to counter the threats and

respond to challenges affecting the international situation today.

A broad range of issues were discussed at the talks, such as the ongoing financial crisis, Russia's proposals on the European energy charter, security issues and major international issues including the situations in Caucasus, the Middle East, Moldova, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

On the formation of a new architecture of European security, the two sides agreed to engage in more talks in the very near future. Solano said the EU will strive to support and help Russia with the first Middle East conference due to be hosted by Russia.

However, the BBC's Richard Galpin in Moscow says divisions between Russia and the European Union seem to be growing ever wider, and this latest summit, held in the far east of Russia, made that abundantly clear, with little sign of progress on any significant topic.

Russia and the European Union need each other. Europe gets its one quarter of its requirement of oil and gas from Russia and Germany alone depends on Russia for 30% of its energy supplies. Russia is the EU's third biggest trading partner.

Russia, likewise, depends on European market and technology. Half of all Russian exports go to the EU. Russia needs enormous investments to modify its pipelines and other infrastructure. Technology is abundantly available in Europe for Russia.

The European Commission estimates Russia will need to invest in excess of 700 billion euros (\$905 billion) into its energy sector between now and 2020. Furthermore Russia's long-delayed effort to join the World Trade Organization could be realized with the cooperation with the

EU.

- There are four major issues, among others, that divide them:

- Expansion of Nato eastwards bordering Russia
- Deployment of US missile defence system in the Czech Republic and Poland
- Kosovo recognition of EU and
- EU's eastern partnership programme.

Russia dismisses the argument that the US missile defense system in Central Europe is designed to protect US and European national security interests. Russia does not see these plans make any political or military sense. Since there are no ICBMs in the countries that the US describes as 'axis of evil', Russia poses question against what countries this system would be used, implying that they could be used against Russia.

On Kosovo issue, Russia vehemently opposes its independence and recognition by major European powers, and continues to claim Kosovo as a Serbian province, reflecting its historical ties with Orthodox Christian Serbia.

Russia considers that Kosovo's independence will boost the ethnic demands for greater autonomy or independence. It argues that recognizing the unilateral declaration of independence would legitimize the doctrine of imposing solution to ethnic conflicts.

Every would-be ethnic or religious separatist across Europe and around the world has been provided with a tool kit on how to achieve recognition.

The Eastern Partnership Initiative of EU aims to forge close political and economic ties in exchange for democratic reforms. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have signed up to the initiative, which seeks to bol-



ster stability in the region. However it does not offer the prospect of eventual EU membership

"We would not want the Eastern Partnership to turn into partnership against Russia. There are various exam-

ples," Mr Medvedev told a news conference at the end of the summit. "I would simply not want this partnership to con-

solidate certain individual states, which are of an anti-Russian bent, with other European states," he said.

Moscow has accused the 27-member bloc of creating new dividing lines in Europe by offering closer ties to six former Soviet republics.

A tense summit meeting between Russia and the European Union has failed to provide assurances Europe will not face another mid-winter gas cutoff. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has also warned that stronger European ties with former Soviet republics should not turn into an anti-Russian coalition.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said his country has no problem supplying the fuel or honoring its delivery commitments to Europe. He blamed the continent's recent energy disruptions on the inability of Ukraine to pay for its own supplies. About 20 percent of Europe's supply of natural gas comes from Russia through Ukrainian pipelines.

Medvedev was speaking at the end of a Russia-EU summit held against a background of deep divisions over security, trade and energy supplies. He also signalled a new gas crisis may arise, suggesting Ukraine lacks the money to pay for gas Russia provides. A row over prices severely affected supplies to Europe in January.

There is a risk that Russia will distance itself from 'Europe' in its social and political development if EU does not address the concerns of Russia in Europe, commensurating its economic and military power.

Global issues such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, arms control, global financial crisis, energy, global warming, and violence in Iraq and Afghanistan need coordinated efforts of EU and Russia. If Russia is not on board these issues, global peace will be elusive.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## NATO celebrates 60th anniversary



BILLY I AHMED

FROM Nato's foundation in April 1949 until dissolving the Warsaw Pact in July 1991, the role of Nato was dictated by confrontation with the Soviet Union. The United States functioned as a protective umbrella for Western Europe and played the leading role inside the alliance. This was accepted by European governments, although France's decision to quit leading NATO bodies in 1966.

The Nato summit, which coincides with the 60th anniversary, took place on 3 and 4 April. It was dominated by the occupation of Afghanistan - the most protracted war carried out by the military alliance in its 60-year history. A polarisation is taking place between the US and Britain on the one side and leading European countries on the other over how best to prosecute the war.

Both sides are ready to intensify the conflict at enormous cost to the Afghan and Pakistani population. Increasingly, however, European countries, with France and Germany at the fore, are demanding that their own contributions be rewarded by increased influence over imperialist decision-making bodies including Nato.

While Afghanistan is at the top of the Nato agenda, the summit also discussed Nato relations with Russia, the role of France in the alliance and to prepare a new strategic concept. The summit is being held just two weeks after the decision by the French parliament to fully reintegrate France into the structures of Nato.

The Nato summit follows the G20 conference in London, where Germany and France presented a united front in opposition to US and British proposals to deal with the economic crisis. Nevertheless, just as the G20 summit revealed intense fault lines between the Atlantic partners over economic policy, the list of contentious foreign policy issues between the US-Britain and leading European nations is growing.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the European want for American protection fell away, and the tasks and aims of Nato were up for renewed definition.

In principle, two paths were possible: building an independent European military alliance leading towards the dissolution of Nato, or transforming Nato into a global intervention force, keeping the dominant role of America.

At the Rome conference held in November 1991, the summit signalled the transformation of Nato from a largely defensive military alliance into an aggressive intervention force for imposing the economic, political and geostrategic interests of its members on a global scale.

In line with the new doctrine, Nato has carried out a series of military interventions since 1991 notably in the Balkans and Afghanistan. These interventions were supported by Nato partners on both sides of the Atlantic.

At Nato's 50th anniversary summit in 1999, the US once again used its influence to ensure the alliance expanded its limits for military opera-

tions by undermining clause V of the Nato Treaty, which allows military action only to defend Nato member countries from an attack. The new doctrine allowed "out of area" operations against other countries or regions and allowed Nato to carry out aggressive military operations without the sanction of the United Nations Security Council.

Over the same period, at the behest of Washington, Nato conducted a systematic policy of encirclement of Russia. Following the 40-year post-World War II standoff with the Soviet Union and its allies, the US government used Nato as an instrument to increase its influence in several Eastern European countries and to isolate Russia.

The outcomes of this policy exploded to the surface last year following the Georgian invasion of South Ossetia, which led to a dramatic heightening of tensions between Russia and America, which had given the green light for the invasion.

For their part, leading Western European nations have shown no scruples about waging wars "out of area." They have sent troops to Africa, engaged in policing the Middle East and deployed troops in Afghanistan.

At the same time, the European ruling elites have watched with mounting alarm as the US transformed the alliance into an increasingly aggressive military instrument for advancing American interests across the globe. In particular, the growth of tensions between the US and Russia cut across the close relations needed by European Union nations

heavily dependent on Russian energy supplies.

In response, the European Union has undertaken some early steps to develop a rival military intervention force. It has established a 25,000-strong Nato Response Force (operational since 2006) and the EU Rapid Defence Force comprising 60,000 soldiers.

Nevertheless, European nations continue to confront enormous financial and political obstacles in their effort to create a pan-European military capacity. US expenditure on its military (around \$600 billion) is still more than double the military spending of all EU states combined. At the same time, European governments confront broad public opposition to their military engagements abroad.

Unable to compete directly with the US militarily, European nations have shifted the struggle to the ground of Nato itself. Under conditions where 21 of the current 28 members of Nato are members of the EU, the European ruling elites are demanding more say in Nato decisions. This is a crucial aspect of the recent decision by the French government to fully rejoin the alliance.

The strategy that is now being followed by the French government was spelt out in a contribution in Le Monde published to correspond with the 50th anniversary of Nato.

In April 1999, French defence expert Francois Heisbourg declared: "For France to play a leading role in the build-up of European defence, it must once again be fully integrated into Nato."

The recent US military escalation in Afghanistan and Pakistan points to the latter conclusion. The decision to increase troop presence in Afghanistan was taken by the administration in Washington without any consultation with its European allies. Both the French president and the German chancellor have rejected sending more troops to Afghanistan.

In his only media interview before the G20 meeting and the Nato summit, French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared, "There will be no military reinforcements" from his country to Afghanistan. The economic and financial crisis is redrawing the geostrategic map. Tension between the great powers that have simmered over a long period are beginning to erupt.

This is the significance of the joint front presented by Merkel and Sarkozy at the G20 summit against Washington on economic issues. It is only a matter of time before such immersed conflicts surface in the military policy.

Sarkozy and Merkel are still seeking to Europeanise Nato, but in a manner that increasingly brings them into conflict with the Obama administration. The current economic crisis is fuelling conflicts between the great powers that threaten to break the Nato alliance apart and raise the spectre of a new world war.

The author is a columnist and researcher.

## India's policy options on Sri Lanka's ethnic issue

N MANOHARAN

THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who have been waging a relentless war for a separate Tamil homeland, have now been tamed. The LTTE's top leadership has been wiped out; most of its cadre are dead; some have surrendered and the remaining are scattered. The fall of the LTTE coincided with the re-election of UPA government in India and India's overall policy towards Sri Lanka, therefore, is not expected to change dramatically. The new government under Manmohan Singh however, will want Colombo to address two key issues on a priority basis.

First, India requires Sri Lanka to take up humanitarian relief for those affected and displaced by the conflict. Several thousands are wounded and hundreds of thousands displaced. In this regard, India has already announced a grant of more than Rs.1 billion which included dispatching over 100,000 packs containing rations and shelter material for a family sufficient for three weeks. Separately the Tamil Nadu government has announced a package of Rs.250 million as humanitarian relief. India is also considering the expansion of its 50-bed hospital in Trincomalee manned by a 62-member medical team from the Indian armed forces. India will also increase the size of the de-mining team that is presently operating in the country to ensure that civilians have access to more safe areas than is possible at present. Depending on the first hand report by Indian envoys comprising its Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor, India is considering an additional Rs.5 billion aid package exclusively for the displaced civilians. The next step is resettlement of the displaced at their place of origin. India can cooperate with other countries and aid agencies involved in the relief and resettlement to evolve a coordinated approach. This is presently missing.

Second, India believes that the Sri Lankan government should seriously work on a political solution that "includes devolution of power, participation in the election and full rights for Tamils as citizens of 'Sri Lanka.'" India's consistent position on the island's ethnic issue has been in favour of "a politically negotiated settlement acceptable to all sections of the Sri Lankan society within the framework of an undivided Sri Lanka and consistent with democracy, pluralism and

respect for human rights." In this regard, India wants the Sri Lankan government "to put forward a credible devolution package at the earliest." Ideally, India is pushing for a '13th Amendment plus formula' as a final solution and the implementation of the 13th Amendment as an interim measure until a final solution is reached through the processes of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC). The underlying problem with the APRC is that important parties like opposition United National Party (UNP), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and Tamil National Alliance (TNA) are not part of the Committee deliberations. Thus, the principal objective of generating a consensual political document on the ethnic issue is lost. Unless this shortcoming is overcome, all efforts of the APRC would go in vain. Realising the importance of the 'southern consensus' and most importantly of a bi-partisan agreement between the two main Sinhala parties of Sri Lanka (UNP and SLFP), India has urged the UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe to work with President Rajapaksa on the ethnic issue.

Although India discouraged the Sri Lankan government from exercising the war option, it did not restrain itself from providing non-lethal military supplies to Sri Lanka and training of Sri Lankan security personnel. This is where India was all along caught in a dilemma: having to maintain good relations with Sri Lanka in all spheres, but, at the same time, also taking into consideration sentiments from Tamil Nadu and the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils. With the LTTE off the scene, this dilemma has been resolved, at least for the time being. However, India should take cognizance of further inroads by China in Sri Lanka on the pretext of aid and development. Colombo should also understand that giving undue space for any power that might turn inimical to India is not good for India-Sri Lanka relations in the long run.

Apart from the above two demands, India should make every effort to pressurize Sri Lanka to begin a process of healing and national reconciliation. Without an appropriate reconciliation process, the wedge between the two communities majority Sinhala and minority Tamil cannot be bridged. A sustainable peace can only be realised with such a process. It is indeed a long-drawn process that requires Indian help on a sustained basis.

Source: IPCS, New Delhi.