

## Russia's new National security strategy

On 2 July 2021 President Vladimir Putin approved the new National security strategy of Russia<sup>1</sup>, the planning document that defines the national interests and strategic priorities of the Russian Federation, as well as the main threats to national security. The National security strategy is updated every sixth year and the new strategy builds on the previous one from 2015<sup>2</sup>. The previous strategy was prepared in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Donbass. Russia's deteriorated relations with the West were already reflected in the 2015 strategy, according to which the West was trying to contain and pressurise Russia, provoke instability in Russia's neighbourhood and destabilise internal social and political situation in Russia, for instance by encouraging colour revolutions. Still, the overall tone of the previous version of the document seems almost moderate compared to the 2021 strategy. The new strategy paints a picture of the world full of contradictions and instability, characterised by growing geopolitical tensions and weakening international legal norms and institutions. The global confrontation extends to military, political, economic, cultural and ideological spheres alike.

A noteworthy feature of the new strategy is the wide range of both internal and external security threats presented in the document and the securitisation of various aspects of society. Consequently, the 2021 strategy backs up the prevailing view of the Russian leadership, according to which nearly all issues can be viewed through the lens of national security. According to the strategy, foreign countries try to intervene in Russia's internal affairs and stir up discontent. Information campaigns spreading false information about Russian society, domestic and foreign policy and history are threatening Russia's sovereignty. Economic pressure, such as sanctions, is also exerted on Russia.

Regarding the ideological confrontation, the strategy calls for moral leadership amid the crisis of the Western liberal model. It states preserving Russian traditional spiritual, moral, cultural and historical values as one of the main national interests. Emphasising the importance of traditional values in Russia, such as religion, the institution of marriage and family values, as a contrast to 'westernised culture', is part of the conservative turn experienced in Russia during Putin's era. In addition, the Russian leadership has aimed to create a national historical narrative by taking advantage of certain historical events, particularly the Soviet victory over Nazism in the Second World War, to promote patriotism, consolidate national unity and legitimise its power. Interpretations of history that challenge this narrative – for instance studies on Stalin's terror – are not accepted and pressure has been exerted on historians studying these topics.

Consequently, the Kremlin's aim to control the flow and content of information is present in the National security strategy. In fact, one of the main changes in the 2021 strategy compared to the previous one is the emphasised role of information security as one of the strategic national priorities. In general, Russia's concept of information security is comprehensive. In addition to cyber security – i.e. the security of information and communications technologies and infrastructures – that is the prevailing concept in the West, information security includes the aim to control the information itself, for instance, the content of the Internet. Particularly information originating from outside the Russian borders is often considered information influence and therefore a threat to national security. In the strategy, the Internet is seen as a central tool of information influence. In order to control information, Russian authorities aim to contain online activities considered a security threat. This particularly concerns the activities of civil society and political opposition, for whom the Internet and social media are crucial as the only free arena of civic activity. However, despite several attempts to censor online content and the stated aim to create a Russian

---

<sup>1</sup> [Http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001](http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001).

<sup>2</sup> [Http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391](http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391).

sovereign internet, the Russian government's actions to control the Internet have yet proved to be insufficient.

All in all, Russia's new National security strategy reinforces the Kremlin's agenda and is in line with the recent socio-political developments in Russia. Of particular interest are the strategy's emphasis on ideological confrontation and information security, as well as the wide-ranging threat perceptions and securitisation of issues. The latter point is hardly surprising, given the strong role of people with military or security background in the Russian political elite. Moreover, when everything is reduced to threatening national security, it can be used to legitimise the authorities' pressure and forcible measures against anything considered unfavourable for the current leadership.

Hanna Mäkinen  
Project Researcher  
Pan-European Institute  
University of Turku  
Finland