

abolition of conscription, with a final plan set to be prepared by 2004.⁵³ Of course, these plans follow previous pledges made by Boris Yeltsin to abolish conscription that have not yet been met, and may, realistically, take a further decade to fully implement. However, other positive steps have been taken. Putin has recently proposed cuts in the size of Russia's armed forces to one million, funding to launch new investment in weaponry, and a restructuring of the defence industry.⁵⁴ Putin has even agreed to accept NATO's help in restructuring Russia's armed forces.⁵⁵ Moreover, Putin recently announced plans to close military bases in Cuba and Vietnam. Thus Russia is taking actions which would allow it to eventually join NATO. And, even if Russian military reforms are not advancing as rapidly as they could be, it is precisely in order to encourage reforms in this direction that NATO should have as a goal Russia's eventual entry.

c) NATO's View

For now, Russia's full fledged entrance into NATO is not on the table, but improving the quality of the partnership is. Russia can not yet meet the entrance criteria applied to the other candidates, but there are other complications. Russia's joining in NATO would make it harder for NATO to agree on external operations. There is also the question of whether Russia could agree to its forces being under European or American command. Finally, Russia's long border with China and Central Asian states would require NATO to adopt special provisions – e.g. defence guarantees limited to Russia's Western regions – before full membership could even be considered.

On the other hand, Russia's entrance into NATO is reasonable if NATO argues that it will carry on a process of enlargement which is not necessarily driven wholeheartedly by security or strategic considerations. This is because Russia might eventually meet the criteria of democratic credentials and liberal economic management. Thus, Russia's entrance into NATO

⁵³ Andrew Jack, "Russia seeks more parity with NATO", *Financial Times*, 22 November, 2001.

⁵⁴ *Gazeta.ru*, January 8, 2002.

⁵⁵ Judy Dempsey, "Moscow asks NATO for help in restructuring", *Financial Times*, October 26, 2001.