

EGMONT PAPER 114

**HOW TO REVERSE  
IN A ONE WAY-STREET**

MARC FRANCO (editor)



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The present publication is the result of a restricted webinar, organized by the EGMONT Institute and the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The event took place on Tuesday 25 May. The text is published in parallel by the two institutions.

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#### **ABOUT THE EGMONT PAPERS**

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# List of interventions and contributions

## INTRODUCTION – WELCOMING REMARKS by

1. Ambassador Hugues Chantry, Director General of EGMONT . . . . . 2
2. Ambassador Alexander Tokovinin, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Kingdom of Belgium . . . . . 4

## FIRST SESSION

3. Sven Biscop, Director Europe in the World – EGMONT, Gent University . . . . . 5
4. Alexey Gromyko, Director Institute of Europe/Russian Academy of Sciences . . . . . 7
5. Alexander Mattelaer, Senior Research Fellow – EGMONT, Brussels University . . . . . 10
6. Yevgeny Primakov, Head Russotrudnichestvo . . . . . 13
7. Marc Franco, Senior Associate Fellow - EGMONT . . . . . 16

## SECOND SESSION

8. Roman Lunkin, Deputy Director Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences . . . . . 18
9. Mark Entin, MGIMO, Chairman of the Council of the Russian Association of European Studies . . . . . 21
10. Fabienne Bossuyt, Gent University. . . . . 23
11. Olga Butorina, Deputy Director, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences . . . . . 26
12. David Crikemans, Antwerp University, Utrecht University, Geneva University . . . . . 30
13. Tatiana Romanova, St. Petersburg State University . . . . . 33
14. Ria Laenen, Leuven University (contribution not included)
15. Elena Alekseenkova, Leading Research Fellow Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences . . . . . 36
16. Laura Vansina, Brussels University . . . . . 39

- BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS . . . . . 42**

# 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR H. CHANTRY, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE EGMONT INSTITUTE

As host of this conference organized in close cooperation with the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences it is great pleasure to welcome Ambassador Tokovinin, Director Gromyko, and all the distinguished participants in today's discussion.

I want to thank Director Alexey Gromyko for the excellent collaboration as well as Vera Bunina, Director of the Russian Centre in Brussels. Without Vera's active engagement and support it would have been impossible to organize this conference.

Our cooperation with the Institute of Europe started more than five years ago.

We have jointly organized successful yearly seminars in Moscow and in Brussels. We have published several joint studies. Last year we agreed on a joint publication, also involving Chinese and US political scientists, on the theme "Biden's World? Views from the United States, China, Russia and the European Union". We are working on an analytical summary of analysis and forecasts, that we will share with you soon. It will be interesting to see to what extent the analysis and predictions formulated by the six experts reflect reality when we read them again in the autumn of this year, one year after they have been written.

As far as today's seminar is concerned, the starting point is the bad relations between EU and Russia. We seem to be sleepwalking in a continuously worsening situation. Is this unavoidable or can we imagine scenarios with small (or big?) steps that allow the two parties "to climb down the tree together" or to quote the title of the conference: "to reverse in a one-way street" where we seem to find ourselves.

Of course, many seminars have been organized on this theme, and many speakers have addressed the issues. But the usual approach is to outline the steps the other side has to take in order to unblock the situation. We have chosen in this seminar to reverse the argumentation and we ask speakers to take the position of the opposite party and to imagine the steps their own government could take in order to reverse the trend towards worsening.

We have succeeded in bringing together an excellent panel of experts and I am confident that we will come up with some "out of the box"-suggestions

Because this is delicate matter, we have decided to keep the participation of the conference limited to the speakers and commentators. Of course, very strict

Chatham House Rules apply to the proceedings in order to allow all speakers to express themselves in all freedom.

I wish you success with your discussions and I am looking forward to listening to the debates and the solutions that will be formulated.

## **2. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY H.E. A. TOKOVININ, AMBASSADOR OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

It is really a pleasure to address the new session of the dialogue between the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Egmont Institute in Brussels.

The regularity with which these sessions are organized is encouraging. When I came to Brussels, one of my bright impressions was the participation in a session like this where I heard a lot of constructive ideas. Some of them were far-reaching, and they were expressed on both sides. I think this format helps to generate positive ideas both for the Russian-Belgian relations and for the overall situation in Europe.

Unfortunately, in recent months and years, the developments have been taking a rather negative direction, but that does not mean that we should shut the channels of dialogue and stop talking. On the contrary, I believe that in a difficult situation we should be talking more, we should be searching even more actively and energetically for ways to overcome the impasse.

And in doing so, I don't think we should be discussing the question of who must pay what price for what, but rather try to provide creative approaches to the development of our common continent, because the basic facts remain the same. Russia and the European Union are two major actors on the European continent, and they stand to benefit much more from their cooperation than from a confrontational posture.

I do believe that this session of the dialogue will be conducive to providing new impetus for turning the tide of events in the right direction and for understanding that, against the background of rapid changes that we witness in Europe and in the world, we do need to think big, to think strategically and to search for common responses to common challenges.

### **3. INTERVENTION BY SVEN BISCOP, DIRECTOR “EUROPE IN THE WORLD” EGMONT INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF GENT**

As Chairman of the first session of this conference, I first want to thank H.E. Tokovinin, Ambassador of Russia and the Director General of EGMONT, Ambassador Chantry, for their welcome address. They mentioned the importance of this conference and let me just underline how rare it is that in one format experts from Russia and the EU together discuss this sensitive topic of EU-Russia relations. Not only politicians but also political scientists have the bad habit to stay in their own echo chamber. This conference is one of the rare occasions when experts get out of their own comfort zone.

As Chairman it is not my task to present my own views, it is my task to prepare the platform for the speakers to make their contributions. The context of the conference has already been alluded to by the two Ambassadors.

There is not much joy in EU-Russia relations or in relations between Russia and the West in general. Judging by recent events, relations seem to be set to worsen rather than improve. Diplomatic initiatives end up in incidents, and diplomatic communication in shouting matches, while military posturing is not really a sign that constructive engagement is being considered and direct and indirect interference in the domestic politics of the other side envenoms the relationship.

In the end, all sides have a basic interest in improving relations and in active economic and political cooperation, but many leaders seem to be guided by short-term political and electoral calculations rather than by long-term perspectives. Even academics and other experts seem to be caught up in the dominant narrative of their own side and appear less and less capable of formulating non-partisan analysis and proposals. But: it is innovative proposals that are needed to get out of the conflict atmosphere and avoid that the world “sleepwalks” into a major crisis.

We propose to take up this challenge: in a restricted webinar, among selected experts, we launch a reflection, “out of the box”, to explore what initiatives could possibly initiate a process of choreographed “climbing down the tree together”.

In this session, 2+2 speakers would each make a maximum 8-minute introduction. To start a constructive exchange of views, it could be agreed that every speaker concentrates on steps that his side could take as a first step, indicating what steps from the other side could then be expected to lead to a process of des-escalation.

In a second session, that will be moderated by Roman Lunkin, Deputy Director of the Institute of Europe, 4+4 experts are invited to comment on the proposals made and add their assessment of their feasibility and effectiveness.

The conference is short, at this stage there is no time for a more thorough discussion. It will be very useful to organize such a follow discussion, perhaps in combination with a discussion of the papers that we published together with the Institute of Europe with a more geopolitical focus “Bidens world? Views from the United States, China, Russia and the European Union”. We intend to glean ideas and proposals of that publication and of today's presentations and submit it to an (hopefully live) conference in the autumn.

#### **4. INTERVENTION BY DR. ALEXEY GROMYKO, DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF EUROPE (RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES), CORRESPONDING MEMBER (RAS), PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN STUDIES (RUSSIA)**

##### **Ripples in a Pond**

The state of affairs in the relationship between Russia and the European Union is dismal. Probably it is in its worst shape since the end of the Cold War. The reasons are many as well as pretexts and unrelated factors.

Russia felt that its interests were neglected, and the chain of events distorted by the West's attitude to the events in August 2008 in Georgia and in February 2014 in Ukraine. Brussels believes that in both cases Russia was the culprit and aggressor. As in Iraq, Russia was against the "liberal" intervention in Libya but later the West accused Russia of murky activities inside this dysfunctional state. Russia is proud of crushing ISIS and other terrorists' groups in Syria, but the West has been accusing Russia of supporting despotism. Moscow is adamant that Alexey Navalnyi was not poisoned on the territory of Russia, but the West blames it for attempts to assassinate political opponents. Moscow says that recent accusations against Russia in the Czech Republic are ridiculous, but Brussels calls for solidarity with Prague. More than 60 countries have concluded agreements with Russia on the "Sputnik V" vaccine, but in the EU there are strong arguments against it as an instrument of Russias neo-imperialist policies.

The list of such mutual incriminations seems endless, complaints and finger pointing are abound.

One way to explain this situation is to proclaim the objective nature of the present stand-off and accept it as given and intractable. And do nothing. However, in my opinion, the situation is not natural, moreover it runs counter to common sense, not to mention professional assessment. Economically, culturally, technologically and even politically there are much fewer fundamental cleavages between Russia and the EU, then these days many people think. In recent years differences between the two sides have been extremely exaggerated for the sake of tactical political gains.

Russia and the EU were not mentally inept or adolescent when for quite a while they pursued the policy of strategic engagement and partnership. This strategy was buttressed by strong economic, investment and security interests and by a dense fabric of institutions. Alas, even challenges of international terrorism or the current

pandemic have not reversed the trend. The opposite is true – relations have been only deteriorating.

What went wrong? There are several explanations. The one is the state in world politics, which in the past years and even decades have been working not only on convergence but on divergence of regional and global players. By now, decoupling has turned into a household expression. It is now intrinsic, in different forms, to the relations between the USA and China, the USA and Europe, the EU and the UK, China and India, in the relations among some states in the post-Soviet space. There are numerous malfunctions in the development of the United States, the EU, Russia, the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel and the plethora of other countries and multilateral bodies.

International relations have stuck in the phase of rebalancing, as it happened many times in history. Each time this phase led to the rise in tension and conflicts. Currently, we witness numerous manifestations of de-globalization, of protectionism, sometimes in disguise of new industrial and technological strategies, of attempts to consolidate itself at the expense of others.

The EU is much more multi-dimensional in comparison to nation-states. This circumstance entails advantages as well as weaknesses. Bilateral relations of Russia with different member-states of the EU and relations of Russia with the supranational structures of the EU are two distinctive tracks, which of course intensely overlap. Along bilateral tracks the situation is multi-speed reflecting a wide range of opinions and interests of different EU member-states. The most problematic is relationship between Russia and the official structures of the EU.

Keeping in mind the current situation, we need “ripples from pebbles cast into a pond” much more than some new mega projects to salvage what is left of strategic cooperation and cooperation as such. In other words, we need small steps and incremental changes to try to bring about de-escalation.

In this regard Nord Stream 2 for a near future is better to leave as the last mega project between Russia and the EU. Until the geopolitical storm subsides, it would be unwise to launch something similar, which may quickly fall prey to entrenched misperceptions. Many experts even suggest that Moscow and Brussels should put the relationship on pause and stop paying attention to each other until more lucid minds come to the fore. However, if we do nothing than we will be engulfed by more regrettable developments harming both sides.

I would borrow a couple of terms from the military vocabulary. One is a “tale chase” meaning a military target and a vehicle pursuing it in order to destroy. In case of intercontinental ballistic missiles, it is very difficult to tale chase them. So instead of trying to do almost the impossible it is better to let the geopolitical missiles, which have already been launched (some landed and some not yet), to inflict their damage.

Meanwhile all those, who are willing to improve relations, can use their energy and ability for something doable in the EU – Russia interaction, preparing ground for a “day after”.

Another term from the military vocabulary is the “upload potential” — something that can be restored quickly. Indeed, many mechanisms of cooperation were put on hold, but it does not mean that they were destroyed. The same applies to relations between Russia and NATO. Hopefully, in the foreseeable future some of these mechanisms will be in demand again and we do not need to reinvent them.

For the time being, I do not see what may reignite the EU – Russia relations from within, especially after the collapse of the German-French proposal at the July EU summit to invite Vladimir Putin to Brussels. But there are rays of hope from outside: firstly, it is the impulse due to Putin – Biden’s talks in Geneva, and secondly, the summit of P5 states (permanent members of the UN Security Council), which is now again quite likely.

What other pebbles can Russia cast into a pond? I will point out at least three of them. Russia can use its chairmanship in the Arctic council to promote a positive agenda. Six member-states of the EU are observers in this important international organization. Russia can use the EU Green Deal in order to try to find common ground with the EU instead of letting it become one more apple of discord. Russia’s role in the future of the Iran nuclear deal and in the future of Afghanistan can be points of convergence with the EU.

In conclusion, I would like briefly to touch upon a notion of solidarity. I understand perfectly well how important this principle is. However, it is counterproductive to devalue it to esprit de corps, to the lowest common denominator. Quite often Russians hear from the EU colleagues that it takes two to tango. However, there are 27 members of the EU and for Russia it will always be impossible to tango with all of them at once.

When for domestic or other reasons one of the EU member-states does something provocative and unsubstantiated towards Russia, to express solidarity with such actions and as a sideshow act to throw away Russian diplomats is to betray the meaning of solidarity, not to reinforce it. More often such events happen, less numerous is the community of Russians who believe in the normative power of the European Union and in its ability to pursue fair play.

## 5. INTERVENTION BY ALEXANDER MATTELAER, SENIOR RESEARCHER EGMONT, BRUSSELS UNIVERSITY

### Europe-Russia Relations: Reciprocity Is Key

Europe-Russia relations are caught in a paradox. From a European perspective, it is perfectly possible to have ample respect for the artful diplomacy of the Russian Federation and great sympathy for the Russian people, and at the same time worry that the Russian regime is treating Europeans as adversaries. To be convinced that there is little to be gained from conflict, does not mean that conflict is inconceivable. The recent visit by the European High Representative Josep Borrell to Moscow shows that such concerns are increasingly widespread. Indeed, European policy communities are becoming convinced of the notion that they are Russia's adversary – for the simple reason that Russia treats them as such. In this respect European policies are largely articulated on the basis of a reactive mindset (unlike the more pro-active policies of the US). Against this background, one may wonder what the purpose of is “improving relations”. If the price of improved relations is acquiescence, then improving relations is arguably increasing the risk of conflict yet to come. The question at hand is what Europeans themselves could do to escape this paradox. This essay proposes four hypotheses addressing this question. Unsurprisingly, the overall conclusion is that reciprocity is key.

Firstly, Europeans could be much more self-critical of their own policies. Cheer-leading the European project is commonplace in European policy-circles. This carries the risk that European policies tend to become self-congratulatory. The European Eastern Partnership arguably constitutes a case in point. Being convinced that European integration is not just a means to an end, but an end in itself, has led many to believe that the geographical expansion of the European project is preordained and therefore cannot know any logical limits or geographical boundaries. Such European self-righteousness cannot help but intrude on the geography and psychology of the Russian state. Against this background, the waiving of European flags on Maidan Square cannot be seen as anything else as the geopolitical expansion of the European project all the way to Russia's doorstep.

Secondly, European leaders would do well to speak truthfully and candidly in order to avoid further confusion entering the relations with Moscow. In particular, this relates to the core message that if the vital interests of any EU member state (or any NATO ally) are at stake, Europeans will stand united. This is also the reason why many member states are currently in the process of hardening the policies vis-à-vis Moscow. In effect, their allegiance to the spirit of solidarity and consensus within the

European Union and NATO ultimately trumps narrowly defined national considerations. The swift coordination of European reactions against the brazen Belarussian act of intercepting Ryanair flight 4978 highlighted that Europeans will come to the aid of the weakest and most vulnerable member states.

Thirdly, Europeans must aspire to avert conflict by recognizing that conflict is not impossible. This is an important philosophical point. Signaling that there is nothing to be gained from conflict is important for influencing cost benefit calculations. Yet for such messages to be conveyed credibly the messenger must truly believe conflict to be a real possible outcome, albeit one that needs to be averted. In this respect it is precisely the underestimation of conflict that has allowed Europeans to inadvertently increase the risk thereof, namely by not taking this prospect seriously enough. In many ways taking the risk of conflict seriously boils down to the same as taking the Russian Federation itself seriously. This point also relates to the artificial separation between economic and security policies, which is widespread in EU policy-making and an important component of careless international policy. In fact, Europeans would have much learn from Russia's skills in coordinating actions across different policy domains.

Fourthly, Europeans can sympathize with Russia's predicament of being squeezed between its western and south-eastern flanks. That is to say: with Russia being caught in between the emerging bipolarity between the United States and China. Indeed, this is something which Europeans and Russia have in common, allowing them to compare their respective experiences. In this regard Europeans can signal they are allied with (or partners of) the United States by choice, meaning they are free to disagree with Washington when needed or when appropriate. The 2003 war in Iraq – the last major crisis in which Paris, Berlin and Moscow were operating fully in sync – bears witness to this. In the context of brewing Sino-American rivalry, Europeans can only hope that Russian authorities will have choices available as well in order to avoid geopolitical entrapment. Europeans would do well to bear in mind that from a Russian point of view, geography may well play in its favor in its Western Military District, but surely not in its Eastern Military District.

At heart, the discussion about improving Europe-Russia relations boils down to the question under what conditions this becomes feasible. It is perfectly natural for the Russian regime to insist on being treated with respect, in particular when its core political and security interests are at stake. This argument goes in both directions, however, even when it concerns small neighboring countries. In its defensive self-conception – as opposed to its ideology-driven counterpart – the European construction is precisely geared to protect the weak from the strong and to constrain the operation of *Realpolitik* on the European continent. In that sense, the only situation in which Brussel-based decision-making does not feature genuine options is whenever the fundamental interests of any member state are being put into

jeopardy. The EU (just like NATO) operates on the basis of a 'one for all, all for one' logic. This means that Moscow must treat all European capitals with the same deference it would like to be treated with in return. As ever, reciprocity is key.

## 6. INTERVENTION BY EVGENY PRIMAKOV, HEAD OF RUSSOTRUDNICHESTVO

Many mark 2014 as the starting point of the current cooling between Russia and Europe – crisis in Ukraine, return of Crimea to the Russian Federation – in Russia it is called “the reunification with Crimea”, after the referendum was held there on this issue. In 2014, the Crimean referendum was the result of a coup d’état in Ukraine. In Europe, this referendum and its reasons are called differently, which does not alter the essence of this event: a violent overthrow of the government in Kiev.

However, the cooling began back in 2007 – when Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking at the Munich Security Conference, noted the constant outside interference in Russian national interests, which threatens Russias security.

Not a single country of the European Union wants to exacerbate relations with Moscow, said Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, at a press conference after the meeting of the EU Council in Brussels on May 10, 2021, which was attended by foreign ministers of the 27 member states.

However, Brussels may be pushed to further strain relations through Euro-solidarity, which some states are taking advantage of. Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš recently called on all EU members to expel “at least one Russian diplomat” because of the 2014 bombing of Czech ammunition depots, which seven years later, in 2021, was suddenly blamed on Russia.

Such a “retrospective” approach to the events history – as well as all historical events – can lead to even more radical conclusions – as, for example, when Poland declared that the USSR was to blame for the outbreak of World War II and even, some voices are being heard – the Holocaust. The danger of this “crisis of old Europe” is that “Young Europeans” now seek to rewrite history and then will proceed to rewrite reality and the future. The reason for this “transition” of meanings is that the most powerful industrial and military force in the world, the U.S., is behind it. The “rewriting of history” has never been a purely scientific exercise, but it has always been and remains a tool for politics in the future, a justification for that politics, and politics is determined by economics.

One of these new “economic fronts,” besides the economic confrontation with China, runs through the countries of “new Europe” – Poland and the Baltics, which purchase liquefied gas from the United States at the highest price, as long as this gas contains “freedom molecules”. I wonder how much pressure Germany is under on the gas issue and to what extent the U.S. does not fear a split on the continent along the lines of “old” and “new” Europe. Isn't this the clearest manifestation of the planned future political shift on the continent?

Hopefully most European countries understand this. According to German political scientist Alexander Rahr, members of the German government, including Angela Merkel, have already begun to realize that the “Young Europeans” do not want any positive dynamics with Russia, artificially imposing Russophobia on the European population through controlled media resources, which have long ago betrayed the principle of independence and impartiality and became active participants of the ordered anti-Russian agenda.

However, despite the low level of political and economic relations, Russia and the EU continue to cooperate in the cultural, educational, and scientific areas.

An example would be the relations with Germany. Our countries share fundamental values, such as a memory of the great and terrible war. The current German identity, like the Russian one, is based on this memory and the desire to preserve peace. In Russia we take into account these fundamental values. Despite our tragic past, we are grateful to Germany for not destroying our monuments on their territory, and for taking care of Russian burial sites. Germany did not adhere to the European Parliament resolution which places equal blame on the Soviet Union and Germany for the outbreak of World War II, and this is one of the bases for building a dialogue.

Another relevant point of cooperation for both Russia and Europe would be health-care. The “vaccine diplomacy” plays a crucial role today.

Russia was the first country to create a vaccine against coronavirus, Sputnik V. However, later drugs – AstraZeneca, Pfizer and others – have already been approved by the World Health Organization and relevant European structures, unlike the Russian vaccine. This is a strange, but very revealing situation, in which we understandably see political overtones. It is not a politicization coming from our part, but we believe it exists. For us, the vaccine is a way to save lives, thanks to some significant medical technology developed in Russia.

Combating climate change and “green energy” may also become the most important area of cooperation between Russia and the EU, as the Russian President Vladimir Putin indicated in his speech during the SPIEF.

Today Russia is not only a country of great past, but also of present, due to modern technologies in IT, medicine, scientific research, Rosatom projects. Moreover, the ideological basis is also important – traditional democracy, fair rules of the international game, and security is what we offer the world today.

Humanitarian policy in general should not be perceived as some kind of aggressive expansion. The great Russian culture that is known, understood and welcomed in Europe. It also provides a space for dialogue as culture sets the norms of a peaceful life. The same is true for education, which in times of crisis remains a territory of interaction and mutual development.

In most European capitals, including Brussels, there are Russian cultural centers, which could be an excellent platform for interaction with our country, with Russian public organizations and universities, Russian regions – from cultural and humanitarian projects to business ones. We are also happy to work on regional initiatives, including those dedicated to the economy.

We live in a common information space, so preserving the world and saving us all from a disaster is the main goal of modern communications. And the key element is not just supporting, but initiating any contacts and negotiations, any consultations aimed at reducing tensions and the new “detente” and release.

## 7. INTERVENTION BY MARC FRANCO, SENIOR ASSOCIATE FELLOW, EGMONT INSTITUTE

The moment for our discussion is well chosen. Yesterday and today the EU-Russia relations were on the agenda of the European Council. This week minister Lavrov is visiting a number of EU Member States (Greece, Malta, Slovenia, Portugal). In a recent interview Ambassador Chizov stressed the importance of contacts and discussions at higher level and High Representative Borrell also mentioned in an interview that the EU is ready to engage in areas of where we have a shared interest.

However, although talking the talk, at this moment, no side is ready to walk the walk, on the contrary. Over the years since 2014 (and even before) a formidable list of complaints and accusations have been built up against Russia: for its external policy (Ukraine, Syria, interference in western countries political systems...) as well as for its domestic policy (measures making opposition virtually impossible, trend towards totalitarian regime...). Yesterdays European Council conclusion “condemns the illegal, provocative and disruptive Russian activities against the EU, its Member States and beyond”, postponed the planned discussion on Russia to the June meeting and invites the HR and the Commission “to present a report with policy options”.

Speaking from the changed perspective (in my case: what can EU do to unblock the situation) is not easy as the general mood in the EU is certainly not for making first steps. The recent events with the Ryanair plane in Belarus although not directly implicating Russia is certainly not contributing to the improvement of relationships as Russia has spoken in defense of the Belarusian action accusing the West of hypocrisy with a classical “what about” argument.

Let me nevertheless try the difficult task and explore, in line with HRs Borrells remark about the readiness to engage in areas of shared interest, how possibly we could reverse the tendencies of worsening situation.

In the first place, there are some issues on which EU and Russia do not disagree and at least seem to be looking in the same direction for solutions: JCPOA and climate. EU could consider putting the more substantial divergences “between brackets” and more actively engage with Russia at an appropriate political level. Even Bidens US could be part of a constructive dialogue. The confidence created by working together could lead to an unfreezing of the other more fundamental issues.

Secondly, for the EU, more than for the US, economic relations with Russia are a key factor. EU-Russia trade is about 8 times bigger than US-Russia trade and EU investment is about 2/3 of total inward Russian FDI. Relations continue (but slacken) despite the diplomatic rift because Member States, and their companies, move

forward even if the EU is at a standstill. EU should regain its position and impact in the relationship. EU is mainly important when negotiations are taken place. Once an agreement is concluded the implementation is a matter of Member States and their companies to act upon. For the EU, stopping negotiations is a form of “cutting your nose to spite your face”. In order to get back its place in the relationship, EU could take steps to relaunch the negotiations. Here again, putting the conflict provisionally “between brackets” and explore how a political dialogue could start again. A possibility is launching negotiations with the Eurasian Economic Union. This is a fairly easy step that can also easily be reversed if no adequate steps from the Russian side were made in response. Engaging with the EAEU at a political level could be a step that creates confidence and can lead to further de-escalation.

Thirdly, what about the main conflict (Donbas and Crimea) itself? When asked what should be done on the Russian side, the simple answer on the EU side is: “implement the Minsk agreements”. Perhaps the EU could again a look at the agreement and recognize that also on the Ukrainian side the implementation has not been perfect. The special status of Donbas in a Ukrainian federation has not really been adequately handled by the Ukrainian side and the “Steinmeier formula” has perhaps been too rapidly put in the bottom drawer. Proposals for an intermission force have perhaps been too rapidly discarded because of the divergence of view on how, where and who. There is perhaps scope for compromises if each side puts some pressure on the local allies. Apart from a possible improvement in relations between EU and Russia, the local population would gain substantially.

Finally, there is another possible route leading to new contacts and negotiation. The EU position has to a large extent followed the US position vis a vis Russia. The first geopolitical priority of the EU at this moment is getting its transatlantic relations back in order. EU position vis a vis China and Russia, will at least take some inspiration from the US position. If the planned talks between Biden and Putin next month in Switzerland result in some form of “normalisation” of relationships between the US and Russia, a spin-off effect of this evolution on the EU position is not excluded.

Whereas prudent steps seem possible at the international relations between EU and Russia., it is more difficult to imagine how to treat the internal situation, with Russian policies getting more and more restricting and repressive. Perhaps it could be explored how a dialogue on the internal erosion of democracy and respect of rights of assembly, of expression etc. could take place in the Council of Europe. Russia is a member and the argument “what about” (the situation in Hungary, Poland possibly Slovenia) cannot be used.

## **8. INTERVENTION BY ROMAN LUNKIN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF EUROPE, RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**

The latest discussions around the problems between Russia and West, Russia and EU demonstrate that the cooperation with Russian Federation is not the narrow one-way road for both sides. And also, impossible to imagine that it could be so though the war of sanctions makes the Russia-European road more narrow. That's why it's important to change first of all the psychological atmosphere of Russia-EU relations in the new post-covid world.

European leaders and certainly the officials of European Commission have to understand that the political differences of Russia and mainly Western Europe have natural cultural and historical background. That differences will follow our dialogue in the nearest and in a far future and ever. European values in their current interpretation inside liberal democracy are not ideal values for Russia but they are inadequate not only for Russian state and society. Almost half of the global world including significant part of the society in Central and Eastern Europe rejecting so called "western values" (radical interpretation of political correctness and rights of minorities, anti-democratic exclusion of traditionalist political forces from public sphere). Large part of the inhabitants of Europe treated Russia as a symbol of traditional values, identity, sovereignty that stands against liberal West (see the polls of Pew Research Center on Religious belonging and national identity in Europe). This new role of Russia – the informal symbol of traditionalism in Eurasia. There are no any reasons to interpret this fact as informational campaign of Kremlin or as only the features of "right populism". Political ideas on sovereignty and identity are the base for serious talks among experts because it's hardly possible to avoid such tendencies in societies in the major part of the countries in a world where the values of liberal democracy counter to the traditionalism and nationalism. The level of democracy and the role of civil society are also the questions for expert conversation.

From that point of view – Russia as a space of diversity (regional, cultural, religious, national) is the most acceptable partner for EU because the Union is also multidimensional and multinational structure with many levels and speeds inside. All attempts to make more unification in EU or to make EU Commission more powerful failed (pandemic shows the potential for local nationalisms). The most productive relations are between Russia and some countries members of EU. The most effective cooperation is in the spheres where Russians feel themselves as true Europeans and even more (culture, education, religion). Economic relations never stopped because of mutual interests. As director of the Institute of Europe Aleksei Gromyko said there

is upload potential for some mechanisms as for example Russia-NATO relations, cooperation in Arctic Council, Iran agreement, climate agenda etc. and opportunities for improvement as the dialogue on status of Donbass, vaccine diplomacy. In spite of the atmosphere of misunderstanding Russia is inevitable partner for EU and EU member-countries. That's why the radical changing psychology of our relations is worth now.

Pandemic of coronavirus step by step began to change the people's consciousness on the community level towards solidarity in the situation when the states showed their national egoisms and compete with each other instead of the direct support of infected citizens. European society in general including Russian society already showed the high level of civic solidarity facing social problems. In that sense the solidarity is the most needed idea in a world (and certainly on a field of international relations) that full of covid or anti-covid protests, in the situation of the increasing social inequality not only in the poorest countries but also in the prosperous ones. The common needs of the states and their citizens in the epoch of informational and physical viruses are the real background for the cooperation on various levels. Politicians and diplomats could replace the rhetoric of the new virtual "cold war" and sanctions clashes by the real international solidarity. National interests combining now with the issues of the climate change, with the ideologically motivated extremism that still alive, with new military competitions of US-China or Russia-US. The words of prof. Mark Entin have to be the new slogan of the new period of the Russian-European relations – same family, same challenges.

In fact, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the creation of EU there is a space of multidimensional Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok where citizens (approx. one third of them in Russia) are relatives and neighbors. They often read the same novels, believe in the same gods and myths, ideally want to live under democratic rules, with democratic institutes with the same civilizational background and everyday demands. The policy of sanctions and the absence of the Russia-EU treaty lead to the hard consequences. First of all, opponents in EU begging to ruin the current state system in Russia (may be for good reasons but this sounds too destructive for common citizens) and as alternative suggest the opposition that also wants primarily to destroy the state system as Bolsheviks. Secondly, the sanctions policy strengthens the pressure on the civil society and all societal institutes inside Russia. In the context of this dangers European politicians and EU leadership in particular could provide more flexible policy towards Russia.

The strategic development of the Russia-EU relations is impossible without common language and common understanding but do not expect complete agreement in everything. It's impossible and not really needed in so multilateral and multidimensional world in which we live. Global responsibility of post-covid world lays on the selective solidarity and in the understanding of the fact that the states and big inter-

national actors as EU, Russia, USA, China, India etc. must seek consensus or cooperation in some spheres for the sake of sustainable development and promotion of the climate agenda. Sanctions or direct political pressure create only phobias that ruined the global world around and solidarity inside the states.

## 9. INTERVENTION BY MARK ENTIN, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF THE RUSSIAN ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN STUDIES

Today we witness a very disturbing phase of international, interstate relations. They are in transition. Our societies understand more or less well what they resembled before. But nobody has the knowledge of how they are likely to look tomorrow.

Such a situation creates risks and challenges to all international players and political forces. But none of them turned out to be on the level of expectations. None of them was able to oppose these new risks and challenges with anything at all.

Neither USA, nor European Union, China or Russia managed to provide all-inclusive leadership in solving global problems and conflict resolution because for that they needed to closely cooperate with each other. Instead, they opted for unilateral approaches and tried to get benefits on the expenses of others. It had a devastating effect. Especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

It's a pity. New technological revolution could have created a world of opportunities. Unfortunately, they are wasted, and fair competition for the benefit of mankind is transformed into technological wars, wars of sanctions and countersanctions, and politics of containment.

Five principles of the EU policy towards Russia are an obvious illustration of that. Experts from Russian side may believe that small steps in improving the EU-Russia relations would be able to pave the way for their normalization in future. Such a logic will lead to nowhere.

Experts from the EU side give a list of the fields where, according to them and their countries, cooperation between Russia and the EU is feasible. The problem is that the EU and its Member States tried to implement such an approach for about five years. Nevertheless, bilateral relations stuck into confrontation deeper and deeper.

The reason is obvious. Until the EU abandon the policy of five principles towards Russia no normalization of relations of any kind could be expected. Selective engagement kills the spirit of cooperation. It creates conditions when for Western politicians is safer and more promising to hide behind anti-Russian rhetoric, and for private companies – not to expend business relations with Russian counterparts or to invest in them.

That is why if the EU side decide one day to restore friendly, peaceful and sustainable relations on the continent, it must start with abandoning the policy of selective engagement and to turn around in the direction of the policy of engagement short.

By the way it concerns not only the EU relations towards Russia, but towards China as well. All of us needs something like the EU wide new Brandt Eastern policy.

The key problem is that the EU has no policy towards Russia. It has a policy against Russia and thoroughly implement it.

In any case if we really want to launch a process of normalization of the EU-Russia relations, we must start with stopping the information war that is destroying the continent and breaking everything in its path. The EU side knows quite well that behind all sanctions, freezing exchanges and negotiations, making demands and accusations against Russia as well as advancing all sorts of conditions, there is an information warfare. Reality as far as Russia is concerned (including its involvement in Eastern Ukraine, Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Belorussia, etc.) is entirely different. But when the EU assign Russia to be an adversary it transforms Russia into an adversary. This is the logic of warfare.

Let's not forget, that though till now Russia does not behave in any case as an enemy of the EU or as an ally of an enemy, Moscow has a huge potential to counterattack the EU everywhere and in all dimensions. If the EU continues to cross redlines Moscow starts to speak about, it could be used.

The second step both Russia and the EU need to make consist in creating an efficient mechanism of preventing any country, any political force or Mass media from transforming day to day contradictions into open exaggerated conflicts, especially from inventing new cases like Litvinenko, Saalsberry, Navalny, seven years old shell explosions in the Czech Republic, etc. with the purpose to hide the trough and worthen relations any time there is an improvement, signs of détente, lifting of sanctions is looming or the European Council is to have a debate on future policy towards Russia.

For that Moscow and Brussels must not forget that both of us – Russia and the EU – are members of the same family of European nations and we face the same risks and challenges. Taking that into consideration, they must behave accordingly.

## 10. INTERVENTION BY FABIENNE BOSSUYT, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF GENT

Several developments in the past few months have shown that the EU's relations with Russia continue deteriorating at a rapid pace. This is of course very worrisome. It is clear that the EU's current policy of the five principles, which was introduced in the wake of the crisis over Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, needs to be evaluated, so that we can have a concrete idea of what is working and what is not working in this policy. Such evidence-based insights are urgently needed in order to re-assess the EU's current policy.

The book that I have recently edited with Peter Van Elsuwege "Principled Pragmatism in Practice: The EU's Policy towards Russia after Crimea" (published by Brill), which assesses the EU's five guiding principles for relations with Russia, suggests that a revision of the EU's current policy will be needed in order to pursue a more effective and constructive policy towards Russia. This conclusion is finding growing resonance among experts, who echo the need for a more strategic policy towards Russia.

As Sabine Fischer has argued: "The guiding principles have earned praise for being flexible and sufficiently balanced to keep on board Member States with very different positions and interests vis-à-vis Russia. But they have also been fiercely criticised for a lack of policy goals and strategic vision". The contributions to our book largely confirm this view and point at the broader paradoxes and challenges that have characterised EU-Russia relations in recent times. Awareness of these broader trends and features is essential if the EU and Russia want to move beyond the lingering deadlock in their bilateral relations. The contributions offered further insights that help to understand the dynamics underlying the worsening relationship, which will need to be addressed to overhaul the EU's current short-term policy towards Russia in favour of a more constructive, long-term strategy.

First of all, the profound discord between the EU and Russia is reflected in the actors' diverging images and perceptions, which have in turn engendered a deep-ingrained misunderstanding and lack of trust. Diverging images and perceptions can be major obstacles to the enhancement of relations between the EU and Russia. Hence, it is essential to understand how these divergences have emerged and how they have been manifested. This is important not only in order to be able to identify confidence-building measures to restore trust, but also in order to develop a common vision for cooperation between the EU and Russia.

A second factor that has impeded constructive cooperation is the mismatch between the EU's ambitions as a global norm-setter, which is perceived as paternalistic from

a Russian point of view, and Russia's ambitions to become a norm-setter in its own right. Several chapters in our book, especially by Russian authors, argued that this mismatch lies at the basis of both the worsening relationship between the EU and Russia and the difficulty to engage in cooperation that has manifested itself since the 2000s. Russia has no interest in cooperating with the EU if it can only be 'a passive consumer of EU norms'. Instead, it seeks recognition as an equal actor in today's multipolar world. Russia thus wants to move beyond a 'master-pupil' or 'donor-recipient' relationship, which can be observed, among other things, in specific areas such as higher education and transnational security threats.

So far, the EU has shown only little readiness to answer Russia's desire for cooperation on an equal footing. As one of the chapter in our book indicated, the EU's Global Strategy has further cemented the EU's binary logic, whereby it asks Russia to conform to the EU's vision of security and cooperation, and identifies Russia as a 'strategic challenge' as long as it does not do so. An increasing number of scholars have criticized this approach and are calling upon the EU to accommodate Russia's desire for cooperation based on an equal footing.

Last but not least, there is the lack of a common position among the Member States, which has always been considered the Achilles' heel of the EU's policy towards Russia, especially after the Eastern enlargement of the EU. The current disagreement among the EU Member States is making it very difficult for the EU to find a way out of the lingering impasse in its relations with Russia. EU Member States remain deeply divided as to the most appropriate and effective approach towards Russia. Some Member States, like France, Italy, Greece and Hungary, promote a pragmatic, instrumentalist strategy of constructive engagement, while others, like Poland and Lithuania, advocate a normative agenda and insist on a policy of containment.

The overall conclusion from these points is that the key challenge in defining a new long-term strategy for the future of EU-Russia relations will be to develop a common vision for cooperation based on mutually acceptable parameters. In this regard, the challenge is double, as the EU needs to develop a vision that is shared by its internally divided Member States, as well as by Russia.

This challenge is very visible when it comes to the implementation of the EU's principle of selective engagement. Although the latter fully reflects the spirit of 'principled pragmatism', the implementation of this principle turns out to be difficult, and this is of course in large part because the sanctions regime and the lack of trust complicate the level of engagement in practice. It is clear that the developments of the past few months have further revealed how deep the lack of trust between the EU and Russia is. However, on top of this lack of trust, in the absence of a precise definition of the selective engagement, it has been very difficult for the EU and its Member States to agree on the areas that qualify for selective engagement with Russia. Several EU Member States, including Germany and France, and institutional

actors, in particular the Head of the EU Delegation to Russia, Markus Ederer, have been proposing specific areas for selective engagement, including the Arctic, the digital sphere, cooperation with the EAEU, regional infrastructure, and the Northern Dimension. However, other EU Member States, including Poland and Lithuania, have been fiercely opposed to extending the areas of selective engagement, mostly because they lost faith in a cooperative approach towards the Kremlin. These are mostly EU Member States which, based on their own historical experiences with Russia, believe that the Ukraine crisis confirmed the failure of a cooperative approach towards Russia.

To restore trust with Russia, it seems essential to develop a ‘step-by step’ approach based on confidence-building measures, which – if successfully implemented – could eventually lead towards broader and longer-term cooperation. In this respect, some lessons could also be drawn from the EU’s Northern Dimension (ND) policy. The latter constitutes a pragmatic, multilateral framework for cooperation with Russia and essentially focuses on issues of ‘low politics’, such as environment protection, social welfare, transport networks and cultural cooperation. This allowed the ND policy to succeed in a context of deteriorating bilateral relations.

# 11. INTERVENTION BY OLGA BUTORINA, CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR RESEARCH AT THE INSTITUTE OF EUROPE

## Russia and the EU in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Geo-Economics

Over recent years trade and investment flows between Russia and the European Union showed little positive dynamics. The future depends not only on the duration of mutual sanctions, but also on a new, fresher view on the vast landscape of our geo-economic cooperation.

There are three areas of policy effort that need to be addressed.

**Untapping the potential of regionalism.** The first area lies in launching institutional dialogue between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the European Union, primarily between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the European Commission. The EU maintains political, economic and cultural dialogues with many regional integration organizations on all continents. Its cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) spans for almost five decades. According to the EU External Action Service the European Union and Latin America enjoy privileged relations of “natural partners, linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties”. Regional, sub-regional and bilateral levels of relations prove to be mutually reinforcing<sup>1</sup>. Everywhere in its relations with other regions the EU aims to promote intraregional integration. Russia and its historical partners are the only apparently selective exclusion.

Until recently, EU officials denied the very possibility of dialogue with the EAEU referring to its low integration capacity. This explanation looks farfetched if we take into account the fact that the EU has a long history of framework agreements with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries – from the Yaoundé Convention of 1963 to the new ‘post-Cotonou’ agreement, initialed in April 2021. Being the poorest in the world, ACP countries do not form a region or a network. Contrary, the EAEU is a fully-fledged customs union.

Starting first an informal and later an official bilateral dialogue the EU and the EAEU will form a new platform for negotiations, putting apart some painful issues in the present EU-Russia’s relations. Such a dialogue may send a strong positive signal to political stakeholders in Europe and Eurasia, as well as to their economic agents.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/13042/eu-celac-relations\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/13042/eu-celac-relations_en)

Untapping the potential of region-to-region cooperation, the two parties may discover new solutions to some “hot” geopolitical issues, like the issue of standards in the global digital market where the EU strives to become a leading rules setter.

**The mighty international euro.** Since the introduction of the single European currency, the EU declared that it would not promote the international role of the euro. The only primary objective of the ECB’s monetary policy is to maintain price stability. European policy makers proceeded from a common assumption that a stable currency would gradually win a place in the sun for itself. They delicately shelved a politically sensitive issue of the dollar’s dominance in international trade and finance.

Approaching its 10-th anniversary, the euro gained tangible results as a key global currency. It acquired quite visible shares in most segments of international finance. A half-century European dream to speak with one voice at the international financial fora came true. However, the global financial turmoil of 2008 and the following euro area debt crisis have brought to naught previous achievements.

The composite index of the internationalization of the euro (in constant exchange rates) declined from 23.6 in 2006 to 18.2 in 2017; it bounced to 19.8 in 2019 and dived again to 19.3 in 2020. From the fourth quarter of 2019 to the fourth quarter of 2020 the share of the euro in international deposits dropped by 3 percentage points and in foreign currency debt issuance it diminished by 2 percentage points.

At present the euro accounts for 21% in global foreign exchange reserves, 23% in international debt and 17% in international loans lagging far behind the dollar with the subsequent shares of 59%, 62% and 54%<sup>2</sup>. And if previously the EU officials avoided mentioning the “exorbitant privilege” of the dollar, now this vocabulary has returned to public discussion.

In December 2018 the European Commission made the first move away from its previous neutral stance to the euro’s internationalization, adopting its Communication “Towards a stronger international role of the euro” and a recommendation on the use of the euro in the field of energy<sup>3</sup>. The global role of the euro was featured high on the agenda at the Euro summit on 25 March 2021 while the European Commission highlights the need for more geopolitical financial sovereignty.

The ongoing preparation to the introduction of the digital euro is one of the ECB’s tools to construct a new, more balanced international financial framework. Since autumn 2020 the process chaired by Fabio Panetta, Member of the Executive Board of the ECB, has entered an active phase.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/ire/html/ecb.ire202106~a058f84c61.en.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/towards-stronger-international-role-euro-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/towards-stronger-international-role-euro-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018_en)

Russia is highly interested in diversifying the currency structure of its payments and reserves. At present Russia plays a significant role in using the euro as an invoice currency in the natural gas trade, and it may play a decisive role in modernizing the outdated practice of using the dollar as the only invoice currency in oil trade. Another promising area of common interests – issuance of green bonds. In 2020 euro accounted for 50% of the overall issuances (including EU issuers) and for 35% of purely international issuance (by non-residents), while 50% was issued in dollars and the rest 15% in other currencies.

Noteworthy, during the first years of the euro the ECB and the Bank of Russia established close ties, they constantly exchanged information and best practices. Groups of senior officials and experts shuttled between Neglinnaya street in Moscow and Kaiserstrasse in Frankfurt am Main. It's the proper moment to make use of this legacy and to regenerate cooperation between central bankers.

**Constructing common economic language.** The digital age today is full of incredible surprises. One of such surprises is the absence of access to the most fundamental economic knowledge, literally the ABC of economics. Some essential texts exist only on paper and are not digitalized, some are digitalized but not available for free access and many of them are not available in the native language of users. In fact, this area is strikingly not user-friendly. The challenge is fourfold: copyright, translations, digitalization and free access.

Let me quote some examples. The seminal book of Bela Balassa “Towards a Theory of Economic Integration”, 1961 could be downloaded at a price of 42 dollars, or 3000 rubles in Wiley online library<sup>4</sup>. The price is acceptable for large universities in Russia but not for individual students. It would be great if the European Parliament or other European institution redeems copyright and displays this book for the free access for everybody – in the EU and in its “natural partners, linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties”. Translations into Spanish, Italian, Russian or Mandarin will stimulate cultural cooperation and provide a common basement for economists and policy makers.

The theoretical basis of the modern central banks' digital currencies was elaborated by the German economist Georg Knapp in his breakthrough work “The State Theory of Money”, 1905. In 1913 the book was translated in Russian and in 1926 – in English. For the Russian citizens it is nowadays available in one (!) copy in the Russian State Library in Moscow – in its original old spelling with non-existent letters and myriads of hard signs. Fortunately, the English edition can be downloaded freely from the Internet. One can hardly expect that Knapp is available in Hungarian, Latvian,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1467-6435.1961.tb02365.x>

Belorussian, Ukrainian or Kazakh languages. Until now John Menfrd Keynes has been translated into Russian only in a small fraction.

The UK's withdrawal from the European Union has started to pave way to the linguistic diversity. This trend is backed by the progress in artificial intelligence and machine translation and also propelled by the current pandemic. If we use the moment and give good work to translators in Russia, EU member countries and other European nations, in several years we will possess a real treasury – a collection of fundamental texts on economics in dozens of European languages and available for everybody. This will create a true European economic language with a common discourse and comprehensible narratives.

## 12. INTERVENTION BY DAVID CRIEKEMANS, ANTWERP UNIVERSITY, UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, GENEVA UNIVERSITY

The relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union find themselves politically at a low point. Looking back at the past years, one could state that both entities have also used the other party as a ‘meaningful other’ in their own identity building. This *us versus them* thinking has been discussed by several of the main speakers. Unnecessary posturing at both sides has further aggravated that situation. The question which can thus be posed is whether one can look beyond, towards areas of cooperation and perhaps even partnership in the future. Let us explore a few routes.

Alexei Gromyko mentioned the **European Green Deal**. This could very well be an opportunity *for* rather than a challenge *to* the Russian Federation and its relations with EU countries. European oil demand will in the coming decades, relatively speaking, further decline. However, natural gas will constitute a ‘bridge fuel’ towards a renewable energy future. European demand with regard to natural gas is here to stay for several more decades. Since Russia boasts some of the world’s largest reserves, the European market will remain lucrative and stable. Natural gas clearly remains a domain of cooperation. But there are also opportunities in the area of renewables. Think for instance of the vast amounts of nickel that will be needed in electric car batteries. In the Russian Federation there exist various producers amongst which for instance the company *Nornickel* can be seen as one of the cheapest producers. Provided environmental sustainability criteria are implemented, such companies could become future producers for the European market. The same reasoning can be applied to such domains as biomass, if however sustainability criteria are applied. Biomass will become a necessary component for a sustainable bio-based chemical industry. In return, European countries also have expertise to offer. Think for instance about energy efficiency or renewable energy technologies.

As we have been experiencing a global pandemic since the beginning of 2020, there are clear opportunities to work together with other partners in the world to **further strengthen the multilateral framework regarding health**. One could think of early detection mechanisms for pandemics and strengthening the multilateral expertise in the world around the World Health Organisation and its multilateral partners. European and Russian expertise have much to offer in this domain, and could also learn from each other. This is an area that should be de-politicized as much as possible.

Expanding further upon this, there are clear **opportunities** to learn from each other **in the areas of culture, education and science**. Also non-state actors such as universities and associations could play a role. It will probably be in this area of *science and innovation diplomacy* that advances can be made without jeopardising ongoing political tensions. Whether it will be feasible to set up such mechanisms will however depend upon political will at both sides. It would nevertheless be a much more productive way of engaging with and challenging each other.

As regards security, one way out could be to **re-conceptualise security in the pan-European area**. All too often, security is limited to mere 'defence matters'. However, our mutual security depends not merely upon an absence of violence, or a reduction in a mutual mistrust, but also upon the way security is conceptualised and tackled policy-wise. If once applies a 'broader definition' of security, then one would realize that there also exists, next to 'military security', an 'economic security', 'energy security', 'environmental security', etc. In each of these domains, one could imagine projects which are mutually beneficial, much like the Helsinki process in the 1970s tried to stimulate another paradigm to try to escape the *us vs. them*-thinking. Again, political will is needed on both sides for this to succeed.

There is however one domain which demands some more urgent attention: **cyber security**. Cyber threats have the capacity in this highly technological world to undermine mutual trust. One could think of an instrument whereby an information exchange mechanism is created and/or attempts are being made to create a safer cyberspace. Given the level of mutual mistrust that exists between both parties in this domain, this will not be easy. It could however be a milestone for a better future relationship.

There are also the '**geopolitical elephants in the room**'; issues of major geopolitical contention between East and West. Let us name one; the **Ukraine**. Also amongst some Western academics and politicians, there exists an acknowledgement that mistakes were made. Some of those issues have been dealt with in earlier conferences. This is not to say that they agree with the 'ultimate Russian solution', such as what happened in the Crimea. Can we dial back on the events of 2014? There should be room for a much more nuanced debate on both sides, and an attempt to circumvent the current political stalemate. Through confidence building measures very gradual technical steps could be made. One important aspect could be to very gradually create a **more positive geo-economics between East and West**. Perhaps both Brussels and Moscow have seen countries such as the Ukraine as an *extension of their own geo-economic neighbourhood*. Instead of both "forcing" countries such as the Ukraine to choose between both, also another geo-economic future is imaginable. This is a future in which Kiev or regions in the Ukraine can freely engage in trade and innovation with East and West as they see fit. The crux of the problem then lies in how the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union deal with each

other. Perhaps in the area of **technical standards**, some form of indirect cooperation is imaginable. If these technical standards, far away from high politics, could gradually converge, this would at least constitute one hurdle less. Countries such as the Ukraine and others could become *meeting places* instead of *zones of confrontation* between economic models. Such a geo-economic approach will over time also affect the geopolitical relations between East and West. This is not to deny that fundamental differences between both models will not persist. Rather it suggests that thinking 'outside of the box' would be more beneficial for all involved in the longer run.

Last but not least, and further building upon the ideas above, both the European Union and the Russian Federation find themselves in **a world which is in flux both geo-economically and geopolitically**. Because of demographic and technological changes, as well as a growing power competition between the US and China, they have to re-invent themselves and their places on the global scene. This, in my opinion, will spur a more pragmatic approach to the debate about their respective places in world politics. **A bipolar world re-organised around the US and China would in fact not be in the interest of the European Union nor of the Russian Federation**. A careful and pragmatic balancing politics could very well be much more productive for both entities. In such an approach, both Brussels and Moscow, identify what they can achieve with whom, based upon their own interests. In some areas they could cooperate, in others they would not. But at least they could both play a role in world politics and maintain a multipolar system that perhaps would be much more in tune with their own interests than the bipolar US-China competition which currently seems to be in the making. The time may not be right just yet for such analyses, but at least they deserve to be studied and further debated.

### **13. INTERVENTION BY DR. TATIANA ROMANOVA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR SAINT PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY**

The metaphor of reversing in a one-way street is telling. The one-way street, which is in this case a way to ever growing confrontation between the EU and Russia, is framed by certain rules that all traffic participants are to respect whether they like them or not. Yet, there are also certain loopholes that can be exploited to change the direction of individual cars (in this case these are cases of selective engagement). And if more and more traffic participants choose to make use of the loopholes, new rules for the whole system might emerge in the longer run. This paper will first outline some general tendencies of the EU-Russian relationship, then it will touch upon cases of selective engagement and close by recommending how the 'loopholes' can be used.

Five long-term trends characterize the EU-Russian relationship (or the road that this relationship takes) at the moment. They emerged long before the 2014 conflict in Ukraine; but that conflict made those tendencies more explicit.

1. Both the EU and Russia believe that time is on their side. Brussels expects internal changes in Russia, which will result from profound economic problems and aging political elite. Moscow, in turn, sees international relations as increasingly chaotic and believes that profound changes are at work that will undermine the positions of the West. That predisposes both sides to the wait-and-see approach.
2. The EU and Russia do not have (or at least, to not feel) any existential need for cooperation. Even the pandemic crisis did not produce a rapprochement between the EU and Russia. Rather the pandemic led to more entrenched positions, and reaffirmed stereotypes on both sides.
3. None of the sides has a long-term plan for their relations. The EU demands change in the Russian international behavior before going back to 'the business as usual' while Russian representatives stress that they do not want any business as usual. The EU insists on relations based on values, Russia demands equality. But none of the sides suggest any clear substantive long-term goal of cooperation.
4. Both sides gain internally from the present situation. Confrontation with the EU and the West is an important factor of Russia's domestic policy. But equally it is key for the EU's consolidation in its external policy. Thus the argument that none of the sides has anything to gain from the confrontation should be taken with a grain of salt.

5. Both sides are much more preoccupied with their status than with their relationship. Russia is concerned with its equality vis-à-vis the West and the EU; it wishes the others to recognize its right to decide on how norms and principles are to be applied to specific situations. The EU for its part would like to preserve not only the values (of democracy, human rights, the rule of law) but also its position of the key agent of these values. The discussion on international law vs. rules-based order, and wider – on the inability of the EU and Russia to agree on the same language reveal this very status conflict.

Yet, despite these rules that condition a one-way road to confrontation, there are things that can be done. Cases of selective engagement, to use the EU's terminology, can be identified in various fields. Politically, the EU and Russia have a lot to gain from cooperation on the Iran nuclear deal, on the Middle East peace process, on Syria. Some coordination is clearly needed in the CIS area. Economically, the EU and Russia need to cooperate on the Green Deal, which will fundamentally reshape EU-Russian economic relations in the medium-to-long term. In particular, there is a huge potential in cooperation on energy efficiency, hydrogen production, public awareness campaigns. The EU and Russia stand to gain a lot from further dialogue on technical standards, accreditation and certification. The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) still looks into EU standards and the EU learns from Russia's method of products control in the market. The Arctic might gain from cooperation between the EU and Russia. The EU and Russia should cooperate in providing vaccination to the developing countries; the scope of this task requires pooling of all available resources. There are clear gains from research and education cooperation, from the dialogue of civil society.

Yet, the devil is in the details. Politically Russia is sensitive to cooperation on the CIS area whereas the EU is wary of the 'astanisation' of conflict-resolution, to quote J. Borrell, that is of Russia and Turkey sidelining the EU in a bid to resolve or freeze some conflicts. The issue of non-recognition plays an important role in economic area: the EU does not recognize the Eurasian Economic Union whereas Russia does not see the EU as an Arctic actor. Cooperation on fighting pandemic and on aligning standards is 'infected' by systemic features, outlined above. Cooperation on the Green Deal is constrained, on the one hand, by over-compliance of EU companies and banks with sanctions against Russia, and, on the other hand, by the rhetoric that the Green Deal can help the EU to ease its energy dependence on Russia. Russia, for its part, poorly engages with the EU's efforts to shift to renewables, not taking these initiatives seriously. Finally, there is a tendency to geopoliticize civil society dialogue. The EU is concerned about government-sponsored NGOs of Russia, many member states are wary about cyber attacks, some leaders even suggest banning all Russian citizens from the EU. On the Russian side growing restrictions on foreign finance, on NGOs and societal activism also limit cooperation in this field.

Yet selective engagement is the only thing that is left for the EU and Russia to improve their relations. In order to maximize the output, the following things should be done.

1. The EU and Russia should restore at least some institutions that were frozen following the 2014 crisis. These institutions (sectoral dialogues, and Partnership and Cooperation Agreement structures first and foremost) will allow solving some burning issues when crises arise; they also will provide a venue for mutual socialization, which will lead to better understanding of each other.
2. Cooperation should involve experts and professionals rather than politicians and MFA supervisors. That will minimize politicization of selective engagement.
3. Mass media messages should not substitute the substance of cooperation (as it happened, for example, with the visit of Josep Borrell in Moscow in February 2021). Shielding this cooperation from the limelight at the early stage will help avoid black-and-white conceptualization. On the other hand, positive cases of cooperation should be shared widely.
4. Cases of selective engagement should not be automatically conceptualized in a zero-sum logics. Russia is frequently quick at pointing out that no problem can be solved without its participation; the EU for itself tends to emphasize immediately alignment with its vision in the world. Both approaches, however, eventually lead to the zero-sum conceptualization.
5. The EU and Russia should avoid issue linkages in selective engagement. Rather individual cases should lead to mutual socialization and, in the long run, enhancement of trust.
6. The EU and Russia will need to agree on some language, on how they understand at least a limited number of categories, at the very least in relation to selective engagement. That will help to minimize simplistic conceptualization.

Working on small issues seems at present the only way to slow-down the rush to further EU-Russian confrontation. This bottom-up approach will not reverse the one-direction movement. But it could create in the medium-term conditions for this reversal.

## 15. INTERVENTION BY ELENA ALEXEENKOVA, LEADING RESEARCH FELLOW, INSTITUTE OF EUROPE RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

It seems that Russia-EU relations have reached recently the peak of the tree, i.e. the point at which it becomes more and more difficult and inconvenient to keep its positions and the danger to fall from the tree seems quite a real one. Both sides declare the wish to change the situation, but no one wants to lose its face and to make the first step.

If we imagine what “climbing down the tree” in practice means and what we need to make it possible, we have to start with the recognition that **we both want each other to climb down safely**. It would mean that we **don't want each other to fall from the tree** and we need to be sure that **the process of climbing down will not destroy our integrity** (we won't broke our head, hand or leg, i.e. we will not be injured). This confidence seems to be the first and the most important precondition to start the process.

For Russia-EU relations this is the first and **crucial step: to recognize and to voice it publicly that each of the sides doesn't want the other one to be damaged, destroyed or feel insecure**. At the moment the situation is quite the opposite, as soon as each side believes that the goal of the other is to make harm to its opponent.

A lot of mutually detrimental myths illustrate the fears of this type. Russia's authorities and many experts as well perceive NATO's enlargement as a main threat to Russia's security and they do really believe that **EU's final goal is a regime change in Russia**. Current discussions on Ukraine and Georgia's entering NATO are perceived as security threat. The same is fair about the new EU's discussion on the principles of dealing with Russia, one of which is about strengthening of its interaction with Russia's so-called civil society. There is a lack of understanding in the EU that its support for Russia's so-called opposition (or those groups that support Navalny) will be viewed positively only in a very limited circle of Russian citizens and will only convince Russian authorities to continue its pressure on protestors and perceived opponents. Russian society doesn't perceive the examples of “democratization” in post-soviet countries as success-stories, but more like political destabilization and economic collapse. This fact works counter EU efforts to help Russian civil society to become more mature.

**The EU discourse on strengthening of member states' resilience** against the backdrop of Russia's hybrid warfare, cyber attacks and other types of interference is another confirmation that the EU believes that Russia is really going to destroy the EU or destabilize some of the member states.

Another important evidence that both sides see the situation as a zero-sum game is **confrontational discourse on values**. Russia's authorities and a part of the society believe that the EU with its liberal approach represent a real danger to Russia's traditional values and specific model of development. The very thesis that Russia belongs to the European civilization is highly debatable even in the official political discourse<sup>5</sup>, the value cleavages are growing and the identity issues are more and more often becoming the reasons for disputes, grievances and misunderstanding<sup>6</sup>. Looking from Russia it seems that there is a competition in the EU, especially among the East-European countries, for the best new interpretation of the results of the Second World War and USSR's role in it, constant search for new identities and revision of historical events. On the other side, the EU accuses Russia of the support of nationalist and authoritarian parties and movements inside its member states.

**As far as these concerns and fears are not eliminated there will be no serious steps forward.** There are **two available instruments** to help each other to get rid of these mutually horrifying myths. **The first one is changing discourse** and trying to convince each other in having no intentions to make the opponent to fall from the tree.

**The second one is to avoid creating new myths and horrors.** The best example of this emerging new horror is EU's agenda on green energy transformation **which can become either a first common step to climb down the tree or just another one reason to stay where we are, i.e. at the top of the tree with less and less strength to keep the safe positions.**

Green energy transformation is widely perceived in Russia like a new instrument for the EU to get rid of its dependence on Russia's hydrocarbons and deprive Russia of its natural competitiveness and main source of budget revenues<sup>7</sup>. At the same time the recent Putin's address to the Federal Assembly<sup>8</sup> and the speech for the Global Climate Summit<sup>9</sup> stressed that **there is an option to convert this new potential threat for Russia into cooperation opportunity**. In his previous Address of 2020<sup>10</sup> Putin claimed for the UN Security Council permanent members to hold a summit aiming to try to solve any of common security problems. This time he stresses that common climate change can be considered such a problem. After his visit to Moscow Josep Borrell has concluded that Russia is no longer interested in constructive

<sup>5</sup> Russia Is a 'Distinct Civilization,' Putin Says. The Moscow Times, May 18, 2020. <https://www.themoscow-times.com/2020/05/18/russia-is-a-distinct-civilization-putin-says-a70295>

<sup>6</sup> Malinova O. Obsession with status and resentment: Historical backgrounds of the Russian discursive identity construction. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, no. 47 (2014), p. 291-303. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.07.001>

<sup>7</sup> Romanova T. Russia's political discourse on the EU's energy transition (2014-2019) and its effect on EU-Russia energy relations. *Energy Policy* 154 (2021) 112309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2021.112309>

<sup>8</sup> Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, April 21, 2021. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65418>

<sup>9</sup> <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65425>

<sup>10</sup> Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 15 January, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62582>

dialogue with the EU, but **it is Russia who is constantly proposing new areas for cooperation** be it Syrian reconstruction or cooperation on climate change. Thus, **global responsibility that Russia strives to demonstrate should definitely be considered as a window of opportunities to make this first step to climb down together.** New green transformation can become such a window of opportunities.

If the EU really wants to convince Russia that it doesn't want this new green deal to become detrimental for Russia, **Brussels needs to start cooperation on decarbonization together with Russian companies and not only in Russia, but in many other regions as well.** Russian and EU companies could start this cooperation in those countries where they are partners already. For example, in the Mediterranean. As soon as the EU has already declared its new strategies for Africa and for the Mediterranean and allocated a huge amount of money for these new types of cooperation, it seems highly probable that the EU southern neighbors will accept the new cooperation proposal. In this case to enter new energy projects in Mediterranean together with the EU companies and companies of those countries which will embark on green transition, Russian companies will have no choice except for following the new "green" rules of the game. **It will mean for Russia to become a rule-taker, not a rule-maker.**

Thus, **there are two options.** High ecological standards of technologies applied in international cooperation projects in energy field can become a new instrument of the "selection" of partners and sidelining those of them who is not considered "environmentally responsible" enough. Or these new ecological standards can become a new version of "**partnership for modernization**" that took place a decade ago – this time with no political clout, but with the ambitions of global responsibility and overcoming mutual grievances for the benefits of all. "**Partnership for sustainable globalization**" could become a practical depoliticized cooperation area that could help to embark on moving closer to each other without losing faces and could help to avoid zero-sum interaction model.

Thus, green energy transformation could become either a **chance to start climbing down together** or just another attempt to make the one who is weaker **to fall from the tree.**

## 16. INTERVENTION BY LAURA VANSINA PHD CANDIDATE (UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL) AND THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Reversing is a vital step. Yet, what good does it do if one loses sight of the crossroads or traffic lights to come? Once the Putin-generation has left the Kremlin, who will follow in their footsteps? And how should the European Union prepare to seize opportunities that might accompany this generational change?

Today's tense relationship between the EU and the Russian Federation is not the result of a single escalatory moment. Rather, it is an accumulation of incremental steps downward. On the one hand, the EU has failed to develop a fitting Russia policy due to competing national interests and a lack of understanding of what drives Russia. On the other hand, the Russian Federation's confrontational behavior speaks for itself. If the EU wants to strive for a more fruitful relationship with its Eastern neighbor, it should focus on gradual improvements and prepare itself by looking beyond the Putin-era. In what follows, I will elaborate on opportunities the EU could tap into in the process of generational change on the Russian political scene.

The analysis departs from two assumptions. First, considering the difficult relations between the EU and Russia, it serves to zoom in on low-threshold confidence-building measures, such as the economic and cultural/educational spheres. Second, it also presupposes that the Russian political landscape will evolve incrementally rather than change radically.

### Okay, Boomer

Putin and his inner circle spent its formative years in the Soviet Union, where opposition to the West was a key constituent of USSR policy and identity. Today, this leadership continues to treat the West as an adversary. One can debate whether the Kremlins rhetoric on Russian insecurity and the threat of Western aggression is a genuine concern or an instrument of legitimation, and the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. Unfortunately, as the Thomas theorem states, things do not have to be real to have real consequences.

But how long will the current Russian leadership stay in power? Despite whispers that Putin is looking for ways to leave the presidency while ensuring his freedom and privileges, he will realistically remain in office until 2036. Yet, Putin ages and will eventually leave his post, and a next generation will come to power. And with this, change might come.

## **The Gen X: less anti-Westernism, opportunities through opportunism**

What opportunities could this change offer? Nobody starts with a clean slate. Whoever comes into power will inherit a broad range of unresolved issues, and problems such as corruption and cronyism will persevere. Nonetheless, this generation did not spend its formative years under the shadow of the nuclear annihilation of the height of the Cold War. And when the anti-Western stance makes way for more opportunistic behavior, opportunities arise.

If the EU plays its hand well, it has a real chance for a more constructive and pragmatic relationship. So let us think creatively about how it can make the most of this crack in the economic door. First of all, it can offer a more attractive alternative to cooperation with China in a broad range of fields. I argue that the economic sphere has the lowest threshold. While the current relationship between the Russian Federation and China is currently mutually beneficial, the scales are slowly tilting in Chinas favor. No longer conducting like Tchaikovsky, Russia will increasingly fiddle away on the second violin. As a result of Chinas increasingly assertive behavior, the time will come when Russia has to choose between becoming a junior partner to its Southern neighbor or building a pragmatic relationship with the EU. Economic cooperation might be the lowest-threshold way to highlight the attractiveness of a (re)turn to the EU.

Another possibility is to consider drawing upon the Russian diaspora living in the EU to strengthen EU-Russia economic ties. While exact figures are unknown, the Russian diaspora in the EU constitutes at least three million people. Apart from individuals having left the USSR, the past decades have been marked by a brain drain from Russia to EU member states due to political, social and economic circumstances. Many members of this diaspora have reached high-level positions in companies with an international orientation. They are thus very well-placed to interact with companies and government in the Russian Federation, ensure mutual understanding and assist in establishing economic ties between Russia and the EU. This angle is especially promising if Russia would at the same time undergo a modernisation of its economy to tap into its full potential. After all, the country has enormous potential in the markets of technology and engineering, which could easily be a basis for increased economic cooperation with the EU.

## **The Millennials: from mutual understanding to cooperation**

Beyond economics, a second sphere is the cultural/educational one. Here, EU member states should increase their engagement with the younger Russian generations, starting today. Increasingly educated and vocal, they are proud of their country but also want to defend living standards, rule of law and freedom of speech.

One of the main issues touched upon during this conference was the issue of common speech. Indeed, while Russia and the EU generally use the same concept when talking about specific issue, these concepts differ in meaning. This ranges from the concept of a great power over democracy and foreign interference to hybrid warfare. If the EU wants to build a long-term productive relationship with the Russian Federation, it is imperative to develop a shared language. This does not equal pushing our own interpretation on the other or vice versa. Rather, it entails creating common understanding and appreciation, both of which are vital for a fruitful future relationship.

Promoting engagement and common understanding can be a very grassroots initiative. This means that the EU can continue these initiatives even if it wants to wield a stick approach towards the Kremlin. Valuable initiatives could include but should not be limited to educational exchanges, joint youth policy forums, language centres and travel opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the EU should definitely focus on how to get out of the deep pit EU-Russia relations find themselves in now. Yet, it should not simply think about how to reverse today but should also be careful not to lose sight of what tomorrow may bring. Many approaches have already been tried towards Putin and the Kremlin in the past decades. Almost all fall short, either due to lack of unity within the EU, or due to the character of Russias current regime. But future generations have been shaped by different circumstances. They thus may have different identities, drivers and goals. The EU should remain aware of this and prepare itself to grasp any opportunities that might come along with this generational change.

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