

Russia and Europe: Somewhat Different, Somewhat the Same?

ROMANOVA TATIANA

Associate Professor, School of International Relations, St. Petersburg University, Jean Monnet Chair

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Russia and Europe: Somewhat Different, Somewhat the Same?

There are more issues that divide Russia and the EU than that unite them. Although both sides support the fundamentals of the current world-order (especially when confronted with a challenge like IS), Russia believes that the current arrangement does not grant equality and is asymmetrically patterned after the West. While civil societies on both sides believe that sanctions should be ended and relations strengthened, and while both have incurred losses as a result of restrictive measures, they diverge on the conditions of relaunching economic relations, on the feasibility of technical cooperation in the absence of political convergence, and on what EU – Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) cooperation could look like. While the EU and Russia feel the need to cooperate on a settlement in Ukraine, on stabilisation in the Middle East, on the fight against terrorism, they diverge over what should be done, over whether human rights / democracy or security / stability should prevail, and over how international organisations should be used.

In this context two parallel tracks should be promoted. The first one is ad hoc cooperation on burning common threats (the settlement in Ukraine and the fight against IS and terrorism), or economic issues of immediate mutual benefit (aviation, the space, medicine, and gas). Various international fora as well as bilateral EU-Russia arrangements should be open for this cooperation. At the same time, sustainable long-term cooperation depends on conceptual discussions over the future set-up, which would guarantee that the preferences of both sides are taken into consideration and neither feels discriminated or betrayed. Mutual understanding is essential for these discussions, it can be cultivated through wider civil society dialogue, more balanced media coverage, the preservation of existing economic links and expert discussions. Only this conceptual settlement will reverse the current 'divide-unite' split in favour of more unity.

Russia and Europe: Origins of Crisis

The EU believes that Russia challenged the cornerstones of the world order and its aggressive behaviour (particularly in Ukraine) caused crisis. The position of the Russian leadership is fundamentally different. It believes that the current crisis originates in the 1990s when the West (understood as the USA and the EU) did not recognise the end of the Cold War as a common victory, and treated Russia as a defeated party, an unequal partner to the EU / US. The resulting system was patterned after the West 'without due regard for the global context'.¹ Russia accused the West of interference in the domestic affairs of various countries to foster political transformations and revolutionary changes without respect for internal political dynamics or international law.

Moreover, the NATO and the EU have moved closer to Russia. NATO enlargements provoked particular concerns due to both the advance of its military machine and the negative image, dating back to the Cold War. EU enlargements were conceptualised as the disruption of some economic ties but also people to people contacts

because visas were imposed where they had not previously existed for the Russians. Similarly, Russia viewed EU association agreements with Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine as discriminating against Russian companies. It felt that the EU did not respect its various sensitivities when it came to the shared neighbourhood region.

Hence, the Russian official view is that the 2014 Ukrainian crisis resulted from 'systemic problems'. Therefore, Moscow's answer to the EU's mantra 'there is no return to the business as usual for Russia' is: we do not want business as usual.

A brief look at the opinion polls reveals that Russian society broadly supports this official view. About 60% of the Russian population have a negative attitude towards the EU (this figure has only slightly improved recently).² 12% believe that relations with the West are hostile, according to 42% these relations are tense whereas 32% classify them as cold.³ 75% agree that the repatriation of Crimea was just a pretext for the sanctions.⁴ (Polls in the EU also reveal that Russia is viewed as a non-European country by

¹ Sergey Lavrov's article "Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background" for "Russia in Global Affairs" magazine, March 3, 2016.

URL: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391

² Relations towards the countries / Levada-Center. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/indikatory/otnoshenie-k-stranam>

³ Foreign Policy Orientations / Levada-Center. URL: <http://www.levada.ru/2015/10/13/vneshnepoliticheskie-orientatsii>

⁴ Press-Edition #3059 // Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM). URL: <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115622>

half of the population because of the values' gap, and 48% of the Germans believe that Russia is a threat.⁵ Hence, the societies are rather negative to each other.)

48% of Russian big industrial producers recognised the effect of sanctions but 40% denied it.⁶ 64% of SME have not noticed any direct effect of sanctions on their business. 57% of SME declared that demand for their goods decreased as a result of sanctions.⁷ There are also reports on the negative effect of sanctions on EU business.⁸ However, on neither of the sides do these results constitute a substantial demand for a change in Russia-EU relations. At the same time 79% of the Russians argue for the lifting of sanctions (the same position is supported by 69% of the Germans).⁹ 95% of Germans and 84% of Russians believe that it is important that Russia and the EU develop better political relations.¹⁰ However, 66% of Russians are against closer ties with the EU whereas 60% of Germans are for them.¹¹ This difference most likely reflects the difference in how the sides treat interdependence (positive in the German case and negative in Russia, given sanction experience and sentiment that Russian sensitivities, including economic ones, are not respected).

Russian and European Approaches to Global Issues

The first pillar of Russian foreign policy is equality with key global powers.

It presupposes multipolarity (or policentricity, according to the 2013 foreign policy concept) and implies the weakening of the US relative power, a more independent EU and the more active role of non-Western powers (China, India, Brazil). In the words of Sergei Lavrov, 'there has been a relative reduction in the influence of the so-called "historical West" that was used to

seeing itself as the master of the human race's destinies'.¹² However it is yet to be reflected in how the world is governed. Russia sees itself as a voice of non-Western world. The EU, for its part, does not question equality but believes that all players have to converge along the same (Western) values, reserving for itself the role of the norm-setter and ultimate authority.

The second pillar of Russian vision is 'an equal and indivisible security environment'.¹³

Russia is against NATO enlargement. It believes that a different – indivisible and inclusive – security system has to be put in place (and have come with various proposals on that). Russia sees itself as an important guarantor of security, in terms of both traditional and new challenges. The EU does not see itself as a prominent actor in hard security but is ready to cooperate on soft security. It does not reject Russian ideas, but has no appetite to change the security architecture dominated by the NATO. New EU members, due to historical traumas, remain particularly wary of Russia and supportive of a more assertive NATO.

Thirdly, Russia insists on the central role of international law (and the UN Security Council). Changes and modalities of interpretations, which the West develops, rarely meet Russia's understanding.

Moscow labels these attempts as double standards. «You shouldn't play with words and manipulate them», — famously argued President Putin.¹⁴ In line with this vision, Russia rejects accusations of destroying the world order since it was not the one 'who bombed Yugoslavia in 1999 in violation of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act ... [or] that ignored international law by invading Iraq in 2003 and distorted UN Security Council resolutions by overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi's regime by

⁵ Russia and Europe: Rapprochement or Isolation. The results of a representative survey conducted by TNS Infratest Politikforschung in Germany and Russia. URL: https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/internationale-verstaendigung/fokus_russland-in-europa/pdf/2016/Survey_Russia-in-Europe.pdf

⁶ Results of the research "Consequences of Sanctions for Russian Business" / Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. URL: <http://www.rspp.ru/library/view/104?s=>

⁷ Small and medium-sized businesses in Russia have not noticed the effect of the sanctions. URL: <http://www.interfax.ru/business/485756>

⁸ European losses from anti-Russian sanctions. URL: <http://ria.ru/infografika/20150915/1253446590.html>; Economic impact on the EU of sanctions over Ukraine conflict. URL: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/569020/EPRS_BRI\(2015\)569020_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/569020/EPRS_BRI(2015)569020_EN.pdf)

⁹ Russia and Europe: Rapprochement or Isolation. The results of a representative survey conducted by TNS Infratest Politikforschung in Germany and Russia. URL: https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/internationale-verstaendigung/fokus_russland-in-europa/pdf/2016/Survey_Russia-in-Europe.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sergey Lavrov's article "Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background" for "Russia in Global Affairs" magazine, March 3, 2016. URL: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391

¹³ 70th session of the UN General Assembly. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>

¹⁴ Ibid.

force in Libya in 2011.¹⁵ The EU insists that norms have to be adopted to the present situation, mostly reserving for itself the rights of norm-setter. Russian attempts to challenge the centrality of the West in this domain have not been very successful so far.

There are numerous nuances in these interpretations that make cooperation difficult. Russia prioritizes the rights of the group over the rights of individual. Linked to this are juxtapositions of Russian patriotism and invincibility (symbolised by the victory in the Second World War) vs. an EU critical reassessment of history. Russia insists on traditional values as oppose to more liberal approaches practiced by the EU. Frequently caricatured as family values vs. same sex marriages, this distinction is also about Russians believing that they are more spiritual. Security trumps everything in Russia (when compared to market economy or human rights), which is drastically different from the EU position.

The fourth pillar of the Russian external vision is sovereignty understood as non-interference in domestic affairs for the sake of fostering any political change.

This does not mean ignoring violation of human rights or democracy. However, it is not seen as a legitimate reason for any intervention. Rather Russia argues for a constructive dialogue of all the parties involved (possibly with the assistance of the international community). The EU believes that human rights are of utmost value and justify intervention in certain cases. However, in many cases the EU and its members have privileged stability over changes until the situation erupted (i.e. in southern Mediterranean and Syria).

Finally, Russian leadership believes that the West is wary of Russia's power and has always tried to contain it.

In the words of Sergei Lavrov, 'the European countries had apprehensions about the nascent giant in the East and tried to isolate it whenever possible and prevent it from taking part in Europe's most important affairs.'¹⁶ The EU is concerned, however, not so much with the

growth of Russian power but with its intention to be on a par with the West when it comes to interpreting various rules and norms.

In sum, although the two sides talk about the same issues, they frequently talk past each other rather than sharing the same argument. It does not mean that any cooperation is precluded. However, to be acceptable for Moscow this cooperation should be based on three principles. These are pragmatism and result-oriented cooperation where there are shared interests, respect for sovereignty and equal involvement of Russia in all stages of international decision-making.

This cooperation has regional specificities as well. Moscow insists on the respect of its sensitivities and interests in the region of 'near abroad' while making clear that it does not have any plans to restore the Soviet Union. It would like its integration projects (the EEU being their core) to be recognised. It grants its integration partners access to its market, low energy prices and visa free access (including for labour migration). Moscow is also central to resolving various conflicts in this region. It positions itself as the defender of Russian-speaking population. Finally, it proposes various security arrangements in the area.

The EU's strategy is to encourage neighbours to change in accordance with its norms; their prosperity and democratic credentials are viewed in Brussels as a guarantee of the EU's own security. It can also become an attractive market for the EU in future. To influence its neighbours, the EU uses three instruments: technical assistance, access to its market, and visa-free travel. However, the two latter ones remain rather promises on the horizon. Russia has refused to participate in EU neighbourhood policies (looking instead for a special arrangement) and has always stressed that the EU creates problems by making neighbourhood countries choose whether they want to be with Russia or the EU. The EU, in turn, has always been sceptical and apprehensive about Russia-led integration projects. As a result the region became an area of strategic competition. Georgia and Ukraine acquired territorial problems as a result.

¹⁵ Sergey Lavrov's article "Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background" for "Russia in Global Affairs" magazine, March 3, 2016.
URL: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391

¹⁶ Ibid.

Russia views itself as a global power. The EU's rising global ambitions mean that Russia and the EU increasingly frequently deal with each other throughout the world.

The further a region away from Europe the easier for Russia and the EU to cooperate (dialogue on the Middle East, crisis management in Africa, countering proliferation are examples of positive relations).

However, the conceptual divergence between the parties, described above, resurface as well, particularly when it comes to equality, norms interpretation or primacy of state sovereignty vs. human rights.

Russia and the EU: views on common neighbours

The Russian vision of the future of Eastern Europe is linked first and foremost to Ukraine, and the implementation of the Minsk agreements, in accordance with the sequence of points there (immediate and full ceasefire and pull-out of all heavy weapon first, followed by local elections in Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts and adoption of the law on their special status; a number of other steps by Kiev before eventual restoration of the control over external borders to Ukrainian authorities and finally decentralization of the country).

In Moscow's view, Kyiv's insufficient implementation slows down progress.

Long-term settlement in Eastern Europe requires neutral status of the region. Russia interprets it as 'no' to the NATO membership or its military basis. Long-term security guarantees for Eastern Europe states have to be collectively developed by them, Russia and the West and should reflect the principle of equal security for all. Long-term settlement also presupposes an agreement on the economic regime for the region, which is compatible with both the EU's and Russian / EEU norms. It will ideally reflect 'a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific, so that the newly formed Eurasian Economic Union could be an integrating link between Europe and Asia Pacific'.¹⁷

What Russia expects from the West is the logical result of how Moscow sees the future of the shared neighbourhood. Full implementation of the Minsk agreements comes first (with more and consistent pressure on Kiev authorities over decentralisation as well as economic and social aspects in Eastern Ukraine).

Moscow also expects the EU and the NATO to cooperate on defining trade / economic and security regimes for common neighbours (with the involvement of the countries of the region). The new regimes should, in Moscow's view, be inclusive and lead to equal security for all and to a common economic and humanitarian space from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

Moscow clearly demonstrates, however, that it will not allow the problem to be deconstructed into technical issues until there is a global consensus. This goes against EU efforts to agree on standards and some other solutions for Ukraine, for example, in the context of past negotiations on EU-Ukraine association agreement. However, a more constructive attitude along those lines on the part of Moscow could help to depoliticise some issues.

In parallel, rebuilding relations with new EU members is of utmost importance to create a better climate for both settlements in the neighbourhood and the improvement of overall EU–Russian relations. Several initiatives can be considered.

- Dialogue on contradictory historical issues, involving historians, journalists, NGOs (Mutual reproaches should be followed by self-criticism on both sides.);
- Various interpretations of contested historical events to be allowed on both sides, also reflected in the work of the mass media (One way is to oblige them to present alternative visions, along the logic of that used during electorate campaigns.);
- Non-political issues that create cross-border civil society dialogue and engagement (like environmental or educational projects, self-governance and various cultural activities, studies of respective, as in neighbours', languages and culture);

¹⁷ Ibid.

- Shared business initiatives, encouraged through cutting red-tape and possibly providing some credit programmes;
- Refusal of a zero-sum game (Two examples from Russian – Polish relations can be cited. Russia could abandon immediate reciprocity when talking about a monument to the Poles, who died in the airplane crash near Smolensk. Poland, for its part, should not forbid opening museums if they do not neatly match its versions of historical events.);
- Reduced military manoeuvring to encourage confidence on both sides.

At present when the perception of a threat coming from Russia is high, member states more friendly to Russia are unlikely to help Moscow improve its relations with new members (and overall the EU).

The harsh German position on Russia is a condition of new members' support of Berlin leadership. France and Italy, although courting Russia verbally, do not have the power to change the EU's policy (especially when Russian actions remain hawkish). Smaller member states (like Greece or Hungary) use Russia policy as a means of internal EU bargaining (to extract more benefits for their 'yes' to sanctions' extension).

Hence, a more proactive line of Russia, taking the path of small steps in the direction of new members, is required to improve overall relations with the EU.

Politization of Economy: Future of Economic Cooperation

The effect of the sanctions remains difficult to assess. It is hard to separate it from the slow-down of the Russian economy, which started before the sanctions. The fall in EU-Russian trade after 2012 is due to the decrease of oil (and thus, gas) prices. Finally, Moscow rhetorically

diminished the significance of sanctions before making them one of the reasons for Russian recession in 2015.

However, overall trade between the EU and Russia decreased from the 2012 record of €338.5 bln to €284.6 bln in 2014 and further by €70 bln between January and November 2015.¹⁸ According to Russian data, Russia lost about USD 40 bln in 2014 and another USD 50 bln in 2015 due to sanctions (or about 1,5% of its GDP), the EU also lost about 90 bln in 2014-2015.¹⁹ According to EU sources, Russia lost €23 bln and €75 bln in 2014 and 2015 respectively, whereas the EU lost €49 bln and €50 bln.²⁰ The most recent study estimates that in April 2014 through September 2015 Russian economy lost about 11% of its potential growth rate, mostly due to sanctions whereas the EU's economic growth was supported by the fall in oil and gas prices.²¹ Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands and Poland are most affected.²²

The effect of sanctions goes well beyond that. Many deals were postponed because of the direct or indirect effect of the sanctions.

Direct effects result from blacklisted people and companies as well as sectoral sanctions (financial sphere; military, dual use and energy goods and services). Indirect effects are caused by uncertainty of future relations and how it will limit deals with Russians.

Russia is mostly affected by EU financial sanctions. As a result big business competes for scarce domestic resources.

Priority in banking finance is given to giant (energy) companies. The Russian financial sector naturally suffered because EU sanctions cover more than 70% of its banks, preventing them from access to global financial resources. Western energy sanctions will manifest their effect in the medium- to long-term because some exploration and development activities were

¹⁸ Russia-EU Trade Relations. Article by Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the European Union Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov, 20 February 2016. URL: <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/news/russia-eu-trade-relations>

¹⁹ Siluanov praised Russia's losses from the sanctions and falling oil prices in the \$ 140 billion. URL: <http://top.rbc.ru/finances/24/11/2014/5472ededcbb20f50f1970522>; The Deputy Head of Ministry of Economic Development: the Losses for the EU on anti-Russian Sanctions in 2014-2015 amounted to € 90 billion. URL: <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/2583530>, Kudrin: the Sanctions Have a Negative Impact on the Russian Economy/ RIA-Novosti. URL: <http://ria.ru/economy/20151121/1325569509.html>

²⁰ Multi-billion losses expected from Russia sanctions. URL: <https://euobserver.com/economic/125118>

²¹ Sanctions Fall: From the second quarter of 2014, the Russian economy could lose up to 11% growth. URL: <http://www.rbc.ru/newspaper/2016/05/12/57322fb99a794753913fc68b>; The Russian economy has lost 8.4% growth / Vedomosti. URL: <http://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/articles/2016/02/05/626922-ekonomika-lishilas>

²² Kudrin: the Sanctions Have a Negative Impact on the Russian Economy / RIA-Novosti. URL: <http://ria.ru/economy/20151121/1325569509.html>

postponed. However, given current oil prices, it is not certain whether these exploration activities would take place anyways. Some aeronautics business were also affected as a result of limited access to technologies (including those with assembly factories in Ukraine) whereas some military goods were reported suffering from the lack of access to Western electronics.²³

On the EU's side agricultural production and transportation as well as tourist companies suffered the most. The overall losses of EU's farmers due to Russian embargo are estimated as €6-10 bln in 2014 only.²⁴ The tourist sector is mainly affected by dwindling incomes, which limit Russians travelling. Russian import-substitution strategy and fall in income of the Russians also led to losses of European high-technology companies.

The spheres that suffered the least are those of mutual interdependence and need of immediate cooperation.

One illustration is space cooperation where the EU needs Russian expertise. Another example is medicine where problems with the supply of pharmaceuticals to Russia led to the relaunch of the dialogue. Scientific cooperation continued as well. Finally, trade in oil and gas is not affected although both sides are also looking for ways to minimise mutual dependence.

On the other hand, rouble devaluation coupled with Russian counter-sanctions led to some growth of local agricultural production (notably meat, milk products and poultry). Some import substitution in consumer goods (like beauty products) has also been successful. Russia also initiated large-scale import-substitution in energy, military and dual-use technologies. In the longer-run if successful, it will make the Russian economy more immune to any repeat of sanctions' pressure and will also create additional jobs. However, to date the net result of import substitution is limited due to the constrained access to financial markets and top Western technologies, the absence of free production capacities and insufficient global competition. Moreover, scarce resources are diverted to duplicate technologies that already exist in the West.

Could the economy then serve to relaunch EU–Russian relations?

One idea that has been floated is to revive the 2010 EU-Russian Partnership for Modernisation (PfM)? The problem is that the PfM has never been a success because it has suffered from the difference in the EU's and Russian approaches. Russia has seen it limited to the economic field, and technical recipes. For the EU modernisation was first and foremost about political changes (strengthening the rule of law, fight against corruption). Brussels saw economic transformations as a result of political reforms. While short-term and small-scale oriented nature of the PfM (as implemented in 2010-2014) could fit today's relations, the question of the nature of the PfM is more burning than in 2010. Russian leadership is even more sure that no change in the political field is needed.

The EU is much more irreconcilable in its critique of the current Russian political leadership. Moreover, economic relations are constrained by EU sanctions. EU reengagement with Russia is a politically sensitive subject.

Finally, the present Russian refusal to compromise on technical issues while conceptual problems are open works against the second edition of the PfM. Hence, any possibility of the second edition of the PfM is doomed at present.

At the same time, the idea of integration of integration entities is promoted by Russia, which has persisted in its efforts to set up a credible and sustainable integration entity. Economically the Eurasian Economic Union maximises the power of its members in the global economy and vis-à-vis the EU. Politically it is the way to emulate the EU (with its complicated structure of competences' division). It also brings closer the idea of a single economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok. While the EU has never been enthusiastic about the EEU, its attitude has evolved since 2014. The EEU is viewed (especially in Germany) as a way to maintain contacts with Russia and to sustain positive economic dynamics in the continent. Formally the EU does not recognise the EEU because some of its members have not joined the WTO. Contacts are, however, maintained at the technical level.

²³ Russian IT market for defense industry. URL: [http://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/Статья:ИТ_для_оборонно-промышленного_комплекса_\(рынок_России\)](http://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/Статья:ИТ_для_оборонно-промышленного_комплекса_(рынок_России))

²⁴ The EU has listed the industry's most affected by Russia prodembargo. URL: <http://rg.ru/2015/07/14/embargo-site-anons.html>

The short-term prospects of EU-EEU cooperation remain bleak. Both sides politicise EU-EEU contacts.

For Russia the problem is again conceptual. Hence, overall conceptual settlement becomes an issue again. While agreeing on the need to converge norms, Moscow finds it unjustified that it will mostly be EU norms. The EU, for its part, believes that the EEU is a political project.

In the medium-term, cooperation between the EU and the EEU will depend primarily on how seriously Eurasian states treat their integration and on whether they develop a credible legal order.

A face-saving solution, which will allow the EU and EEU to converge their standards without just a one-way transfer of the EU's rules also has to be developed. One way to do this is to discuss rules in the context of international organisations (like the WTO or UN Economic Commission for Europe).

The overall conceptual agreement on long-term relations will facilitate the development of EU-EEU relations.

Russia and Europe in the Middle East: a Chance for Cooperation?

The EU and Russia share numerous threats originating in the Middle East. Among them are radical Islam and mass terrorism; massive immigration, bringing numerous internal problems; mercenaries travelling to hot spots and back and recruiting successors; proliferation of weapon of mass destruction, which complicates its control and dilutes relative power of major players; and destabilization of energy markets. Both the EU and Russia are interested in reducing volatility as much as possible.

The Russian vision of its role in the Middle East is complex. Firstly, it presupposes participation in the overall settlement of the Middle East, which includes the elimination of the IS (including through military means); a political settlement in Syria on the basis of the Geneva format and preserving it as a single and secular state; the end of conflicts in Libya and Yemen; overcoming the consequences of the Arab

spring, in particular in Tunisia and Egypt; the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict; and the prevention of civil war in Lebanon. Secondly, any measure in Moscow's views should be based on non-intervention in domestic affairs, including for any forced democratisation, on the respect for international law and for the rights of various Christian groups as well as ethnic minorities (like Kurdish population). This is again the case where conceptual principles condition and complicate any cooperation on a specific issue. Thirdly, Russia would like to limit the spread of radical Islam to Russia or its vicinity. Fourthly, it would like to preserve its Khmeimim airbase in Syria and naval facility in Tartus and at the same time to keep the Middle East as a zone free of the weapon of mass destruction and chemical weapon. Finally, close cooperation with major oil and gas producers in the region through the OPEC and Forum of Gas Exporters but also bilaterally is of major importance for Moscow.

Several formats of EU-Russian cooperation seem to Moscow feasible and desirable in this region. The specificity of the EU means that cooperation with Brussels should mostly concentrate on laying the basis for varying political dialogue.

Middle Eastern quartet for Arab-Israel settlement, P5 + 1 for non-proliferation and nuclear control in Iran as well as regular EU-Russian political consultations at various levels should be explored for that. In military terms, ideally Russian side would like to see ad hoc military cooperation on peacekeeping in Syria, which ensures transparency and non-surprise policy (through the Russia-NATO Council as well as dialogues between Russia and states, involved in the operation) as well as a more general dialogue between Russia and the NATO. Syrian internal settlement should ideally be done through the International Syria Support Group, and on the basis of the discussions in the Geneva format between all Syrian parties.

Finally, various formats can help the EU and Russia to fight soft security threats (like migration dialogue or dialogue between law enforcement authorities). In most cases, these latter formats have remained dormant since early 2014.

The views of EU member states on various Middle Eastern problems have substantially converged over the last years. Strengthening EU competences through treaty reforms played the role. Convergence is facilitated by European External Action Service (EEAS) coordination and by reliance on economic and humanitarian instruments. The strength of the EU's position itself depends on the coherence among member states.

In the oldest, Arab-Israeli conflict has caused the initial divergence between former colonial powers. Although member states still have problems agreeing a common position on Palestine, notably in various UN bodies, the general line is common: establishing a more independent Palestine state and criticizing certain activities of Israel (like settlements). Similarly, EU member states diverged in the promptness and depth of reaction to Iraq situation in 2002 or the Arab spring in 2011 (in particular, on intervention). However, they managed to craft a common post-conflict position.

In Syria, EU members agree on the need to fight IS, to preserve Syria as a secular state but also to support moderate opposition. Yet, the difference resurfaces in relation to how much they would like to contribute to military solution. Moreover, member states diverge on how to manage inflows of asylum seekers. While southern EU members carry the disproportionate burden, there is little consensus on how to share the burden; some member states are reinstalling internal Schengen barriers. While Germany calls for solidarity, most member states refuse to host newcomers. The strength of refugees challenge threatens the EU's internal stability.

Common Security in Europe: Myth or Reality?

Russia and the EU share general concerns about security (proliferation, terrorism and Islamic radicalism as well as climate change and cyber crimes, trafficking in drugs and human beings). Yet Russia is more concerned with hard security (nuclear weapon control and anti-missile defence systems, and conventional arms control). These are the fields where the EU is a policy-taker. The

culture of hard security cooperation talks has never emerged in Russia–EU relations (unlike Russia–US relations). The EU is more interested in soft security issues, especially climate change. Moscow uses this cooperation to reengage with the West but is not a significant player in climate change. In fighting terrorism, the EU and Russia diverge on what to prioritise (human rights are of utmost importance for Brussels whereas in Russia security trumps everything).

The increased role of hard security issues in Europe (following the events in Ukraine) diminished the soft security agenda. However, Russia is portrayed as the main challenge in Europe, which limits cooperation with it, amplifies US influence in Europe and provides the NATO with a new modus vivendi. Military drills and manoeuvring on both sides further deteriorate the situation. This situation prevents any meaningful long-term strategic cooperation on security between the EU and Russia.

The interaction is mostly limited to tactical aspects and ad hoc deals.

The OSCE is seen as one platform of security cooperation between the EU and Russia even under current circumstances. However, the vision of the partners diverges, which complicates cooperation. The EU emphasises the human rights' component but believes that Russia is blocking the OSCE effectiveness. Russia, for its part, praises this organisation as the only currently available discussion forum²⁵ but links its strategic value to the concept of indivisible security in Europe, believing that the EU and NATO have marginalised the OSCE and thus block the idea of equal security for all. In sum, the concept of cooperation in the OSCE and its technicalities remain unclear.

The OSCE, however, can be of particular use for monitoring ceasefire, human rights and elections in Ukraine. This is the area where the consensus is emerging between the EU and Russia, once again proving that at present parties can only agree on cooperation, which is essential and cannot be postponed.

²⁵ Major foreign policy events of 2015 / Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.
URL: http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2003505

Russia–NATO dialogue remains central for security cooperation in Europe. According to the Russian view, the Russia–NATO Council is to be revived at all levels, with both political and military components, and on the basis of mutual respect and pragmatism. In the short-term, both parties need the Council for political and military coordination in the Middle East, on tactical manoeuvring and military drills, on the implementation of the Minsk agreements, on Afghanistan, and regional terrorist threats. These discussions will guarantee minimum predictability. In the long-term, the Council is useful for restarting talks on arms reduction and on antimissile defence system in Europe, the latter causing particular Russian irritation.²⁶ A return to joint military drills as well as the exchange of students in military institutions should take place in due time for the wider socialisation at lower levels.

To ensure the efficiency of discussions, talks on who is more guilty in the current crisis should be avoided (or at least postponed for some time).

However, the lack of mutual trust will remain the key barrier for the effective work of the Council.

Finally, the EU and Russia diverge on the modes of the fight against terrorism. The EU, which still has mostly national reply to terrorism,

engages with the countries of origin or transit of terrorists (like North African states or Turkey) than with Russia, which fights terrorists. In doing so, the EU relies on soft instruments. EU anti-terrorist authorities seem to lack a strategy of cooperation with Russia. EU military and human resources contribution to fight is limited. Of EU member states only France looks to set up some operational cooperation with Russia in Syria.

Russia for its part, has always stressed that there is no alternative to international cooperation against the terrorist threat; it insists on operational cooperation and the development of anti-terrorist conventions.

Moscow is also ready to share its experience. But similar goals are again challenged by divergence in conceptual vision.

Despite this divergence, several formats seem appropriate for EU-Russian cooperation. These are permanent exchange of information on potential terrorists, and their finance, operational cooperation (especially among police bodies), exchange of experience in managing inflows of migrants, and asylum seekers, and cooperation in various conflict-management formats (as described above). These initiatives will allow dealing with most burning challenges while preserving some minimum cooperation between the EU and Russia.

²⁶ Comment by Russian MFA in connection with the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council at the level of Permanent Representatives.
URL: http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2245344



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Tel.: +7 (495) 225 6283
Fax: +7 (495) 225 6284
E-mail: welcome@russiancouncil.ru
119180, Moscow, Bol. Yakimanka St., 1.

www.russiancouncil.ru