

1 Russia and the European 2 Union: Crisis and Prospects

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4 In the drama of 2014 – political crisis in Ukraine, Russia’s annexation of
5 Crimea, armed conflict in eastern Ukraine – Russian–EU relations turned
6 almost overnight into confrontation and near conflict. As Yury Borko has
7 observed, five basic factors define that confrontation today: 1) mutual
8 diplomatic and economic sanctions and counter-sanctions; 2) a ‘freeze’ in
9 official relations and mechanisms for cooperation under existing treaties and
10 agreements, as well as in the working relationship between the two sides; 3)
11 a ‘freeze’ in both official and unofficial talks on preparing a new foundational
12 Russia–EU agreement to replace the outdated Partnership and Cooperation
13 Agreement of 1994 that expired in 2007 and that both parties have renewed
14 annually since; 4) chronic military tensions and confrontational rhetoric –
15 including accusations that, among other things, Russia supports extremist,
16 right-wing, populist and anti-European forces within the EU, and that its
17 intelligence agencies attempted to assassinate Sergei Skripal in the UK –
18 accompanied by actions such as military exercises and flyovers by military
19 aircraft; and 5) the resultant, near-complete breakdown in mutual trust.
20 Russian–EU relations are now at their lowest point in history, having been in
21 deep crisis for five years.¹

22 Most politicians and experts are extremely pessimistic about the
23 possibility of restoring constructive relations. They hold out little hope for
24 resuming institutional dialogue and multilateral cooperation, or for laying
25 the basis for new and more positive relations. Yet some qualitative changes
26 are in evidence that should restore hope to both sides, if not for an imminent
27 breakthrough in relations, then at least for greater openness to dialogue and
28 a search for solutions. Firstly, the crisis has shifted after 2015 from its acute
29 phase to a smouldering, almost routine phase. The parties have grown tired
30 of the confrontation, have recognised the strategic futility of its continuation,

1 and have become politically fixated on the resultant status quo (primarily in
2 Ukraine).

3 Secondly, EU politicians now have a more balanced understanding of the
4 state of affairs in Ukraine. In particular, they are starting to accept that the
5 authorities in Kiev – and not just those in Moscow and Donetsk – bear a share
6 of the responsibility for the failure to implement the Minsk agreements
7 intended to settle the conflict in eastern Ukraine. One indication of this is a
8 recent interview that EU Ambassador to Russia Markus Ederer gave to
9 Interfax in which he said: ‘there is a lack of political will to implement these
10 Minsk agreements ... on both sides’.²

11 Thirdly, the imposition of an increasing number of sanctions and counter-
12 sanctions has burdened both the Russian economy, which continues to be
13 afflicted by economic stagnation, and that of the EU, which has never fully
14 recovered from the 2008–09 crisis.³ Russian leaders constantly emphasise the
15 need to intensify mutually beneficial economic ties in trade, manufacturing,
16 investment and innovation.⁴

17 Fourthly, the Russian president, prime minister and foreign minister have
18 been meeting regularly with senior EU officials and the leaders of individual
19 EU states. This testifies to both sides’ continuing desire to restore the kind of
20 normal relations they both consider obligatory and to overcome the current
21 crisis. In the first 10 months of 2018 alone, Russian President Vladimir Putin
22 either met with or telephoned the leaders of at least 12 of the 28 EU countries
23 (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece,
24 Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Spain).⁵ Over the same period, Russian Foreign
25 Minister Sergei Lavrov met with his counterparts in Austria, Belgium,
26 Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the
27 Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia and Slovakia – that is, with the foreign
28 ministers of 15 EU countries – either in Moscow or during his travels.⁶ In
29 addition, Lavrov held talks with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs
30 and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, German Chancellor Angela Merkel
31 and French President Emmanuel Macron.⁷ Such frequent contact with EU
32 officials contradicts the popular but incorrect belief that relations are ‘frozen’
33 and testifies, if not to a trend towards a normalisation of relations, then at
34 least to a mutual desire that they should be normalised.

1 Finally, the presidency of Donald Trump in the US has led to major
2 changes in international relations, with consequences for both Russia and the
3 EU. The Trump administration's reflexive protectionism and disruption of
4 the existing system of international trade runs counter to the basic positions
5 of both the EU and Russia. The same holds true of Washington's decision to
6 withdraw from the nuclear deal with Iran and the Intermediate-Range
7 Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The fact that the EU and Russia both disagree
8 with the White House's policies and decisions reinforces their motivation to
9 improve their own bilateral relations. China is also a factor in this equation.
10 Beijing remains a strategic partner for Russia, a relationship of some
11 importance to Moscow given that the West has not only maintained, but also
12 increased, its sanctions against Russia. At the same time, it is in Russia's
13 national interest to avoid a one-sided foreign policy characterised by
14 excessive dependence on its large eastern neighbour. This too is a motivation
15 to normalise relations with the EU.

16 Thus, a comparatively new international and economic situation has
17 arisen that may well offer an opportunity for the phased restoration of
18 Russian–EU cooperation – or for such cooperation to emerge on an entirely
19 new basis – however dubious those prospects might seem at present. The
20 Russian expert community generally agrees on the need for Russia to
21 normalise relations with the EU, and with the West more broadly, in order to
22 make progress in the urgent task of national development.⁸ The purpose of
23 this article is to consider additional possible arguments in favour of restoring
24 and, more broadly, forming new, positive relations between Russia and the
25 EU, and to suggest several possible steps in that direction.

26 **Finding the compatible in incompatible positions**

27 The EU responded to the Ukraine crisis by imposing, and later expanding, a
28 raft of political, diplomatic, economic, financial and technological sanctions
29 against Russia beginning in 2014.⁹ The EU Council has renewed these
30 sanctions every six months since then. In addition, immediately following
31 Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the leading EU countries of
32 France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom supported excluding Russia
33 from the G8. The EU also halted systematic meetings and working dialogues
34 within the framework of the Partnership Cooperation Agreement (primarily

1 regular, top-level Russian–EU summits and cooperation within other existing
2 formats).

3 In March 2016, the EU Council unanimously approved the five guiding
4 principles of its foreign policy towards Russia that are still in force today.¹⁰
5 Firstly, it stated that the future of Russian–EU relations is inextricably linked
6 to the situation in Ukraine. Full implementation of the Minsk agreements is
7 the prerequisite for any improvement in relations. The EU also confirmed that
8 it considers Russia’s annexation of Crimea illegal, and unequivocally refused
9 to grant it official recognition.

10 Secondly, the EU declared its desire for closer ties with Russia’s former
11 Soviet neighbours, particularly in Central Asia. It also declared its desire to
12 bolster its internal resilience, particularly in terms of energy security, hybrid
13 threats and strategic communication. Fourthly, it identified a need for
14 selective engagement with Russia, both on fundamental foreign-policy issues
15 (such as Iran, the Middle East, Syria, the Korean Peninsula, migration, climate
16 change and the fight against terrorism) and on other issues where the
17 European Union has a clear interest. Finally, the EU expressed its willingness
18 to provide greater support to Russia’s civil society, facilitate and support
19 people-to-people contacts, and develop scientific, cultural, educational and
20 other forms of exchange, with particular attention to young people, seeing
21 this as a useful investment in the future of the relationship.

22 Moscow’s official position on these issues seems at first glance to be the
23 exact opposite of the EU’s. From Russia’s point of view, the annexation of
24 Crimea is a done deal and is not up for discussion. Russia believes that the
25 authorities in Kiev, more than anyone else, hold the key to resolving the
26 conflict in eastern Ukraine, and perceives the EU’s Eastern Partnership
27 programme and its stated desire to expand its cooperation and presence in
28 Central Asia as placing the EU in intense competition with Russia. Moscow
29 believes that Brussels might want to undermine integration processes in the
30 former Soviet space.¹¹ The EU countries’ desire to strengthen their internal
31 resilience in the fields of energy, cyber security, and hybrid and political
32 threats – encompassing, among other things, fake news, support for radical
33 anti-European political forces and so on – is interpreted as an implicit
34 accusation that Russia is involved in dangerous and destructive activities in

1 these areas. Moscow also harbours suspicions about Brussels' intention to
2 support Russian civil society as a potentially subversive and even hostile
3 action – a form of retaliation for the decision by Russian authorities to crack
4 down on civil society and to limit the ability of Russian NGOs to accept
5 foreign assistance. (Those that have received foreign assistance have been
6 derided as 'foreign agents' and 'undesirable organisations', among other
7 labels.¹²) This stance appears irreconcilable with the EU's, but is it really?

8 As paradoxical as it might seem, Russia and the EU share a wide range of
9 interests and political approaches, even in areas where they appear to
10 disagree. These might serve as the basis for overcoming specific obstacles and
11 for gradually forming new, constructive relations. We will consider these
12 differences in light of the five EU principles.

13 *Ukraine*

14 The Ukrainian crisis is the most difficult issue blocking the restoration of
15 relations. The country's recent presidential election, however, could present
16 an opportunity for moving towards a resolution of this long-standing
17 dispute. New president-elect Vladimir Zelensky was widely supported by
18 voters in the east and centre of Ukraine. He expressed a readiness for
19 negotiations with Putin, and his political rhetoric generally seems more
20 moderate than that of his predecessor, Petro Poroshenko. The Kremlin has
21 also expressed a cautious willingness to have contacts with the new
22 Ukrainian leadership. This makes the possibility of a positive dialogue
23 between Moscow and Kiev, though still extremely difficult, more likely. In
24 his speech at the Valdai Club in Sochi on 18 October 2018, Putin reaffirmed
25 the Russian leadership's firm commitment to the Minsk agreements as the
26 basis for resolving the conflict and as a compromise document that all sides
27 have signed, one that takes into account the interests of all the parties to the
28 conflict.¹⁴ At the same time, he declared Russia's interest 'in restoring full-
29 format relations with Ukraine' and expressed Moscow's hope that 'it will be
30 possible to establish at least some kind of relations with the country's new
31 leadership and to reach agreement on something'. Russia and the EU should
32 do everything in their power to make use of the opportunity presented by the
33 start of a new political cycle in Ukraine.

1 It is important to note that the question of Crimea and that of eastern
2 Ukraine should not be treated as a single issue. The difference is not that
3 Crimea is no longer a problem as Moscow asserts, but that the disagreement
4 is insoluble under current circumstances, whereas a solution concerning
5 eastern Ukraine is attainable. It is understood that the EU and Kiev,
6 regardless of who their particular leaders are, will never recognise Crimea as
7 part of Russia, and that the EU will not lift its Crimea sanctions. Likewise,
8 Russia's neighbouring and partner countries such as China, Belarus,
9 Kazakhstan and Armenia have also declined to recognise the peninsula as
10 part of Russia, something that Moscow will have to factor into its foreign
11 policy. At the same time, the EU should accept the fact that the population of
12 Crimea has largely shifted its allegiance to Russia. (The exception is the
13 dissenting part of the Crimean Tatar community.) The good news is that
14 Crimea itself is not a 'hot spot' and poses no humanitarian threat to Ukraine,
15 the EU or its own citizens. The issue of Crimea must and will inevitably
16 remain a major item on the Russian-EU agenda. It should not, however, be
17 allowed to derail efforts to re-establish Russian-EU cooperation – even if a
18 heavy shadow has fallen over those efforts.

19 Eastern Ukraine, which remains a flashpoint and a hotbed of tension, is
20 another matter. The two sides frequently exchange mortar and artillery fire,
21 and military skirmishes are common. As many as 1.5 million residents have
22 fled the region. Economic and social ties between eastern Ukraine and the rest
23 of the country have been severed. The humanitarian situation is so dire that
24 the citizens who have stayed behind require constant aid. It would be
25 impossible for Russia and the EU to normalise relations without first
26 resolving the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

27 The parties involved must achieve not only a total ceasefire and a freeze
28 in the conflict (which, by itself, would not improve Russia's relations with the
29 EU or Ukraine), but should also strive to achieve a political settlement. The
30 difficulty lies in trying to identify and act on the common interests and
31 motives of the participants and arbiters of the conflict – Russia, Ukraine, the
32 Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics (DPR and LPR), the EU and the US
33 – that are now separated by deep divides. Presently, these motives and
34 interests seem not only incompatible but inimical. The DPR and LPR want to

1 break away from Ukraine and place themselves firmly in Russia's orbit –
2 either as new states recognised by Moscow, following the model of Abkhazia
3 and South Ossetia, or, like Crimea, as a part of Russia itself. Kiev is ready and
4 willing to devolve control (sovereignty) to the eastern territories, but only
5 under harsh terms that would not confer true autonomy or constitute genuine
6 federalisation, and that would require the cleansing of all pro-Moscow
7 politicians from the ranks of the authorities there. The US would like to retain
8 its strong influence over Ukrainian leaders and policy, maintain the country's
9 anti-Moscow stance, and perhaps eventually include Ukraine in NATO. The
10 EU would like to see stabilisation and reconciliation in Ukraine, as well as
11 seeing Moscow restore normal relations with both Kiev and Brussels (in
12 keeping with the objectives of ensuring the stability and security of the entire
13 European continent and the economic development of the EU). At the same
14 time, however, the EU insists that Moscow be held culpable for the larger
15 Ukrainian crisis, that full control over the eastern territories be restored to
16 Kiev, and that the Ukrainian people be given full freedom to determine their
17 own political and military orientation (towards the EU and NATO) without
18 taking Moscow's opinion into consideration.

19 Moscow opposes all of these positions. Recognising or incorporating the
20 DPR and LPR into Russia would make the confrontation with the West and
21 Ukraine even more dire, prolonging it and greatly increasing its cost to the
22 Russian economy and society. It would also mean losing Ukraine as a good
23 neighbour forever. That is too high a cost for Russia to pay. As Putin has
24 suggested, it would have been possible to freeze the conflict in eastern
25 Ukraine with the aid of UN peacekeeping forces.¹⁵ Over the long term,
26 however, the freezing of the conflict and the resulting emergence of new,
27 unrecognised and openly pro-Moscow quasi-states in eastern Ukraine would
28 effectively mean that Russia would remain in conflict with Ukraine, the EU
29 and the West. This would run counter to Russia's long-term interests. The
30 conflict in eastern Ukraine does not need to be frozen, but rather resolved
31 through a full-fledged political settlement.

32 Moscow opposes any solution that restores Kiev's sovereignty over
33 Donetsk and Luhansk but that does not guarantee their autonomy and the
34 protection of their Russian-speaking populations; that does not guarantee

1 them the right to choose their own regional and local authorities, and to use
2 the Russian language; and that does not restore the economic and social
3 structures in those regions that provide for unrestricted ties to and open
4 borders with Russia. In addition, and what the EU only poorly grasps, is that
5 Ukraine's military and political orientation is a defining issue for Russia. It
6 would be militarily and strategically unacceptable for Russia to share a
7 border with a Ukrainian state that was part of NATO or that allowed Western
8 military infrastructure to be stationed on its territory. President Putin made
9 this clear in his 'Crimean speech' on 18 March 2014. In his remarks, he closely
10 linked the desire of Ukraine's post-Maidan leadership to join NATO with the
11 possible appearance of NATO military bases on Ukrainian territory,
12 particularly a NATO naval base in Sevastopol.¹⁶ It is possible that leaders in
13 Kiev and Washington have precisely this outcome in mind. If so, this would
14 render the political and strategic differences between Russia and the US plus
15 Ukraine intractable. Moscow would like to achieve a settlement to the
16 conflict, but only on the condition that the people of eastern Ukraine receive
17 reliable legal and political guarantees as detailed in the Minsk agreements.
18 Russia is also seeking reliable guarantees for its own security, including
19 Ukraine's neutrality (which would foreclose its inclusion in NATO) and the
20 non-deployment of Western military infrastructure on Ukrainian territory.

21 Furthermore, Moscow cannot agree with the EU's unilateral assessment
22 that Russia is solely responsible for the conflict. Moscow insists that the EU
23 acknowledge its own responsibility for taking the dangerous and reckless
24 step of drawing Ukraine into association with the EU without considering
25 Russia's concerns, and that Brussels acknowledge the violent and illegitimate
26 nature of the transfer of power in Kiev in early 2014.

27 The differences between the sides are deep and acute. However, the
28 strategic need to normalise relations between Russia and Ukraine, and
29 between Russia and the EU, demands that politicians and experts search for
30 common ground in order to ease tensions and facilitate a political settlement
31 to the conflict. This will not be accomplished with a single political decision.
32 But the parties do have common interests and should be able to find a basis
33 for normalising relations, even under the extreme circumstances that now
34 exist. The residents of the DPR and LPR want to resume normal life in a law-

1 based democratic state – that is, with firm guarantees that their rights and
2 freedoms will be respected; with political representation at the local, regional
3 and national levels; and with pardons and amnesty for participants in the
4 conflict. Moscow is interested in seeing the conflict end and relieving itself of
5 the considerable political and economic costs associated with it; in restoring
6 normal relations and cooperation with Kiev and the EU; and in the lifting of
7 the Donetsk sanctions – not to be confused with the Crimea sanctions, which
8 are less burdensome. The EU would like to see the situation in and around
9 Ukraine stabilise. This would open the way for the restoration of relations
10 with Russia and the lifting of most sanctions except those imposed over
11 Crimea.

12 Taken together, all this creates a certain potential for a phased settlement
13 of the conflict, given sufficient readiness by all sides to compromise and make
14 concessions for the sake of peace, stability and cooperation. Moscow should
15 make resolving the crisis in eastern Ukraine a foreign-policy priority. This
16 would entail a willingness to accept a phased return to Kiev of sovereignty
17 over specific territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine that
18 are currently under the control of the DPR and LPR. Moscow should also
19 agree that, after the Minsk agreements are fulfilled, control over the Russian–
20 Ukrainian border in that region will be handed back to Kiev; and that
21 elections will be held in that region according to Ukrainian law and under the
22 auspices of international observers. Russia should take part in the restoration
23 of the region’s shattered economy and infrastructure, and stop its media
24 campaign aimed at discrediting and defaming Ukraine. Finally, it should
25 withdraw all military personnel and mercenaries, if any are present in the
26 region.

27 Kiev should carry out its part of the Minsk agreements in full, including
28 its provisions on pardons and amnesty, the exchange of all prisoners and
29 hostages, the restoration of social transfers and economic ties, the unblocking
30 of lines of contact, constitutional reform guaranteeing the decentralisation (or
31 federation) of and special status for individual eastern Ukrainian regions, and
32 the holding of elections there by agreement of all parties and under
33 international control. Ukraine must take Russia’s concerns about its strategic

1 security seriously and be prepared to enshrine appropriate guarantees in
2 legally binding agreements (bilateral and multilateral).

3 To implement these mutual measures, it will be necessary to restore direct
4 and regular contacts between senior Russian and Ukrainian leaders and to
5 allow DPR and LPR representatives to participate if necessary. The hope is
6 that this will be facilitated by Ukraine's presidential election. Certainly, the
7 broad political mandate Zelensky has received from the citizens of Ukraine
8 creates opportunities to move forward. The current leadership of the DPR
9 and LPR, as well as the populations of those territories, should agree to the
10 prospect of returning to the legal and political jurisdiction of Ukraine, and to
11 full participation in the political and economic life of the country. Of course,
12 this will be subject to their receiving all of the necessary guarantees associated
13 with constitutional reform, broad decentralisation (federalisation),
14 autonomy, guarantees of their rights and freedoms, pardons and amnesty,
15 unrestricted cross-border ties with Russia, implementation of a programme
16 for restoring the region's economy and infrastructure, the return of refugees,
17 and political representation in Ukrainian power structures.

18 The EU should contribute wherever possible to the implementation of the
19 Minsk agreements (including within the framework of the 'Normandy
20 format' bringing together France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine),
21 acknowledge its own share of responsibility for the crisis, and participate in
22 the restoration of the Ukrainian economy and the reconstruction of affected
23 regions. Once the settlement process is under way and steps have been taken
24 to normalise relations, the EU should lift the sanctions it imposed on Russia.
25 The EU should also participate in the development and adoption of
26 international legal security guarantees with respect to all its eastern
27 neighbours, and particularly with regard to Ukraine and Russia.

28 The US must renounce all actions that could aggravate the confrontation
29 between Russia and Ukraine and take all steps within its power to achieve a
30 final settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The US, Russia, the EU and
31 Ukraine should develop and adopt measures and legal agreements providing
32 additional security guarantees for all the countries of the region, including
33 Ukraine and Russia. The implementation of these measures will require good
34 will and considerable time, effort and resources from all of the parties, but

1 the benefit gained from reaching a settlement and restoring positive relations
2 would far outweigh the difficulties encountered along the way. Such a
3 prospect more than warrants a firm commitment from all the parties.

4 *Eastern Partnership countries*

5 The countries of the EU Eastern Partnership programme, which are part of
6 the EU neighbourhood policy covering Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia,
7 Georgia and Azerbaijan, have become an arena of competition between
8 Russia and the EU, but it would be unwise to exaggerate the intensity of this
9 competition or to cast it as a potential conflict. Rather, it is worth looking for
10 opportunities for Russia and the EU to cooperate in the region.

11 Each of these six countries is unique and occupies a special place in the
12 context of Russia–EU relations. Ukraine has already been discussed. Armenia
13 and Belarus, through their membership of the Eurasian Economic Union
14 (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), are
15 participants in a process of Eurasian integration and security cooperation that
16 is largely oriented towards Russia – although they are also expanding their
17 mutually beneficial cooperation with the EU. Georgia, especially after the war
18 in 2008, is focused entirely on the EU and the West, although the worst phase
19 of its conflict with Russia is now past. Moldova is generally oriented towards
20 the EU, but skilfully manages to strike a balance between the EU and Russia,
21 diligently avoiding anything that would strain relations with either party.
22 Drawing on a wealth of natural and financial resources, Azerbaijan conducts
23 an independent and multipronged foreign policy, although Turkey remains
24 its closest foreign-policy partner.

25 The EU's Eastern Partnership is a rather modest programme with limited
26 resources, and the EU itself is preoccupied with its more pressing internal
27 problems. By contrast, the region is a top priority for Russia, as noted in the
28 country's 'Foreign Policy Concept'.¹⁷ This asymmetry between Russia's active
29 presence and influence in the Eastern Partnership area and the EU's more
30 limited involvement is likely to persist. Nevertheless, the development of
31 Eurasian integration and a Eurasian system of security are, in principle,
32 compatible with the building up of mutually beneficial cooperation between
33 the EU and the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS),
34 the EAEU and the CSTO. Armenia, for example, is a member of all three

1 organisations and wishes to maintain a strong military and political alliance
2 with Russia, yet is simultaneously interested in developing the broadest
3 possible economic ties with the EU.¹⁸ As part of its foreign-policy strategy,
4 Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
5 with the EU – a new generation of agreement – in Brussels on 24 November
6 2017. The Armenian parliament quickly ratified the agreement and it
7 conditionally entered into force on 1 June 2018. The agreement is intended to
8 promote the development of political, industrial and trade relations between
9 Armenia and the EU. Since 2014, the EU has allocated €120 million in financial
10 assistance to Armenia and provided €412m in investment.¹⁹ The two parties
11 now share a simplified visa arrangement, and the EU has become Armenia's
12 primary export market and its second-largest source of imports after Russia.
13 Armenia benefits from the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+)
14 for trade, and 95% of its exports to the EU are not subject to export taxes.
15 Moscow generally has no problem with this state of affairs: Maria Zakharova,
16 a spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, said in 2017 that 'We
17 promote our relations with countries, including Armenia, on a mutually
18 beneficial basis and with full understanding that each country has its own
19 foreign policy interests, goals and tasks. We respect that.'²⁰

20 The Armenian model demonstrates that it is possible for a country to seek
21 the closest possible relations with both the EAEU and the EU while not just
22 avoiding conflicts, but also building mutually beneficial cooperation. It is
23 telling that the EU and Kazakhstan signed a similar agreement in December
24 2015. Such a measured approach among all the parties in the post-Soviet
25 space, and particularly in the area covered by the EU's Eastern Partnership
26 programme, should make it possible to avoid rivalry and conflict. Of course,
27 the EU should recognise and accommodate Russia's extensive interests in the
28 region, including by agreeing to develop a trilateral negotiations format (that
29 is, one that allows Russia in acute cases to participate in EU negotiations with
30 Eastern Partnership countries). For its part, Russia should raise no objections
31 to a deepening of cooperation between the EU and the countries covered by
32 its Eastern Partnership programme, so long as such cooperation does not
33 undermine Russia's security, trade or economic interests, or the development
34 of the Russia-oriented Eurasian groupings.²¹ The EU Eastern Partnership

1 members should soberly assess their own national interests and maximise the
2 benefits of building relationships with both Moscow and Brussels.

3 Despite the strong economic links between the EU and the EAEU – the EU
4 is the largest trade partner of the EAEU, with more than 50% of EAEU exports
5 going to the EU and 41% of its total imports coming from the EU²² – the
6 relationship between the two organisations remains underdeveloped. EAEU
7 bodies officially proposed establishing contacts with EU institutions in 2015,
8 but such contacts have yet to be put in place. The EU, in addition to remaining
9 highly sceptical of Eurasian integration and treating it as a rival process,
10 projects its negative attitude towards Russia onto the whole grouping.
11 Nevertheless, the possibility of establishing EU–EAEU relations is
12 commanding growing interest.²³ It might be possible to deepen trust and spur
13 trade and investment by establishing official contacts between the EU and
14 EAEU, carrying out a broad exchange of information, and implementing joint
15 programmes in such wide-ranging fields as the digitisation of customs
16 procedures, the development of transport corridors, the safe use of strategic
17 infrastructure facilities, the harmonisation of standards and procedures, and
18 much more.²⁴ A more developed EU–EAEU relationship would create a
19 neutral venue for dialogue and, potentially, harmonisation of Russian and
20 EU positions, helping to reduce the Russian–EU rivalry in the post-Soviet
21 space.

22 *Building resilience*

23 The EU has forcefully accused Russia of attempting to undermine its political
24 stability, supporting radical anti-European forces in elections, waging cyber
25 attacks against civilian and military facilities, using chemical weapons
26 against EU citizens (the Skripal case), and using energy dependency to
27 undermine the EU's strength and security, among other complaints. The
28 Russian leadership has categorically denied all of these accusations as
29 groundless, to no avail. After the attempt on Skripal's life, Brussels evicted a
30 large number of Russian diplomats serving in a variety of EU countries.²⁵ The
31 EU is also preparing to take action against so-called 'fake news' that it sees as
32 destabilising to the domestic policies of EU countries, especially in the run-
33 up to the European parliamentary elections in June 2019. Additionally, the
34 EU plans to develop specific measures for countering cyber attacks and

1 foreign hackers.²⁶ It has continued in its efforts to reduce its energy
2 dependence on Russia, imposing increasingly stringent demands on Russian
3 energy suppliers and displaying a generally negative attitude towards the
4 Nord Stream 2.²⁷ Russia has no choice but to contend with the EU's concerns
5 and complaints because they represent a significant obstacle to the restoration
6 of institutional dialogue and a general improvement in relations. In addition,
7 real damage could be done to projects of major economic importance to
8 Russia, primarily in the field of energy, where Moscow risks losing significant
9 market share.

10 Moscow must also stop the unbridled campaign by state-controlled media
11 to discredit the EU and the West. Otherwise, it will prove impossible to
12 restore mutual trust and create an atmosphere of cooperation. Russia and the
13 EU should both abandon their mutually accusatory rhetoric, stop branding
14 each other as enemies and end all discussion of the possibility of a military
15 clash. Both sides should also drastically curtail all forms of dangerous and
16 subversive activities by their intelligence services. These only poison relations
17 and hinder every attempt at constructive dialogue. The same applies to all
18 attempts to interfere in elections, spread fake news or support radical political
19 forces. From now on, both sides should proceed from a shared understanding
20 of the importance of supporting the internal stability of both the EU and
21 Russia. This will require that both parties adopt strategies aimed not at
22 undermining and weakening each other, but on showing respect and
23 cooperating in the interests of successful mutual development.

24 In particular, this will require opening a dialogue on ground rules and
25 developing international standards in the sensitive and dangerous field of
26 cyber security. Experts recommend adopting such principles as non-
27 interference in political processes, establishing a common definition of a
28 cyber attack, pledging not to attack states' critical infrastructure, internet
29 resources or military facilities – especially its missile and nuclear facilities –
30 and joining forces to stop hackers unaffiliated with specific states.²⁸ Doing so
31 will require that a discussion of cyber security be either established or
32 resumed in all the relevant forums, including the UN and the OSCE, between
33 Russia and the EU, and between Russia and individual EU countries.

34 *Selective engagement and exchanges*

1 Both Russia and the EU recognise the need to preserve and develop selective
2 engagement. Indeed, this is the only point on which both Moscow and
3 Brussels agree unconditionally. Of course, selective engagement falls far
4 short of the strategic partnership they strove for in the past, but it is still better
5 than nothing. The broader and more concrete the cooperation, the stronger
6 the mutual trust that will result, and the sooner practical prerequisites will be
7 created for the resumption of a normal, multifaceted partnership. Official
8 declarations are not enough: what is needed are practical steps and tools.

9 Selective engagement could be based on the list of issues that both sides
10 have already agreed are important. Federica Mogherini, the European Union
11 High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, suggests that the
12 parties reach settlements on Syria, Libya, the Persian Gulf, the Middle East
13 peace process and the Ukrainian crisis; preserve the nuclear agreement with
14 Iran; deal with the situations in the Western Balkans and the Korean
15 Peninsula; and foster cooperation among citizens and civil society.²⁹
16 European Union Ambassador to Russia Markus Ederer also points to cross-
17 border cooperation, cooperation in the Baltic region, developing trade and
18 investment, student exchanges, the rising number of multiple-entry visas that
19 the EU has granted Russian citizens and continued progress towards a
20 simplified visa regime, and forming an energy partnership.³⁰ However, after
21 the events in Ukraine in 2014 and the levelling of sanctions and counter-
22 sanctions, the cooperation that had existed in many areas was frozen or
23 significantly scaled back.

24 Even in the midst of what an EU–Russia Expert Network report describes
25 as ‘de-institutionalization and estrangement’, members of the network are
26 making systematic and valuable efforts to identify possible areas for selective
27 engagement.³¹ On the whole, the authors of the report are sceptical about the
28 prospects for improving relations between Russia and the EU in the near
29 future, noting that ‘sustainable improvement of the relationship and greater
30 convergence currently seem to be a vague aspiration rather than a realistic
31 long-term goal.’³² In their opinion, both sides are now ‘unable and unwilling
32 to change the status quo’.³³ The authors nevertheless propose a number of
33 new areas of cooperation.

1 Within the framework of the common neighbourhood, the authors
2 propose supporting confidence-building measures in eastern Ukraine,
3 primarily aimed at achieving a sustainable ceasefire and creating conditions
4 for the implementation of the Minsk agreements; initiating senior-level talks
5 between the EU, the EAEU and signatory countries to the Deep and
6 Comprehensive Free Trade Area (Armenia and Kazakhstan); and initiating
7 senior-level talks between the EU, the EAEU, China and the Central Asian
8 states to discuss China's Belt and Road Initiative and to establish permanent
9 ties. Russia could cooperate with the EU in multilateral forums to preserve
10 the nuclear deal with Iran, continue the search for joint positions and actions
11 in Syria, and identify and add substance to the less politicised areas of
12 cooperation such as climate change and environmental issues, the global
13 commons (within the UN), and the development of economic relations
14 (within the OSCE). The report recommends that Russia and the EU develop
15 bilateral relations by studying possibilities for economic cooperation in areas
16 not targeted by mutual sanctions. These include providing support for small
17 and medium-sized businesses in Russia and avoiding the imposition of new
18 economic barriers. It calls for creating conditions for more active and
19 multifaceted civil cooperation (in education, science, culture and cross-
20 border mobility, between representatives of civil society and between
21 regions). It is necessary to improve citizens' ease of mobility as much as
22 possible, even when that would require unilateral measures to facilitate the
23 visa process. Finally, at a time when Russian and EU institutions have frozen
24 all contact, it would make sense to initiate an expert dialogue on contentious
25 issues to improve each side's understanding of the other's motives and
26 arguments, and to create better conditions for restoring trust.

27 To advance this kind of selective engagement, the leaders of Russia, the
28 EU and the individual EU countries must adopt, at the very least, a more
29 positive attitude towards the efforts of agencies and non-state actors
30 (business and civil society) to develop well-rounded cooperation. Indeed,
31 they should set the example. The establishment of substantial and regular
32 dialogue among the Russian and EU foreign ministries would send an
33 important political signal on the renewal of cooperation, demonstrating that
34 such cooperation is 'normal' and even desirable for all participants. As

1 Andrei Zagorsky rightly notes, dialogue and cooperation at lower levels
2 continues intermittently and deserves support, but cannot produce results
3 without the restoration of dialogue at the highest level and without EU and
4 Russian politicians formulating a common vision for the future format and
5 goals of their relations.³⁴

6 Both sides officially recognise the need to intensify cooperation between
7 their respective civil societies. As noted, the EU considers support for civil
8 society, and particularly youth, as one of the five priorities of its current
9 Russia policy. Likewise, in its Foreign Policy Concept of 2016, Russia, with a
10 few caveats (such as taking the national, cultural and other characteristics of
11 each state into account) also declares its commitment to democratic values,
12 including ensuring human rights and freedoms. Russia additionally
13 recognises the need to involve institutions of civil society in solving
14 international problems, to develop international cultural and humanitarian
15 cooperation, and to increase interaction with international and non-
16 governmental human-rights organisations.³⁵ At the same time, the EU has
17 repeatedly levelled complaints against Russia for violating its stated
18 principles. In 2018 alone, the EU published 17 official statements about the
19 violation of human rights and the restriction of fundamental freedoms in
20 Russia. These include statements condemning the imprisonment of the
21 Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, the arrests of human-rights activists such
22 as Oyub Titieva and Yuri Dmitrieva, the persecution of Memorial Centre
23 human-rights activists, the mass detentions of peaceful demonstrators, the
24 Russian ban on the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation, the violation of human
25 rights in Crimea and Sevastopol, the growing list of 'undesirable' (and hence
26 banned) non-governmental organisations and the murder of Boris
27 Nemtsov.³⁶ The EU generally views Russia as a country that systematically
28 violates human rights and freedoms, including the freedom of the press and
29 the right to assemble and demonstrate. It has criticised Russia's treatment of
30 non-governmental organisations deemed 'foreign agents' and 'undesirable
31 organisations', the country's restrictions on the holding of rallies and
32 demonstrations, its broad interpretation of extremism, and more. These
33 policies, in addition to Moscow's generally negative attitude towards Russian
34 NGOs receiving funding from abroad, greatly hamper the ability of Russian

1 and EU civil-society actors to cooperate. More generally, the overall
2 atmosphere of confrontation with the West cannot help but negatively
3 influence interaction in the fields of science, higher education, culture and
4 more.

5 Nevertheless, both parties must make every possible effort to develop
6 such contacts. The EU should consider the Russian Foreign Ministry's
7 proposal to resume the Russian–EU dialogue on human rights with a view to
8 restoring their joint work on protecting human rights and freedoms
9 (although the Russian proposal links such efforts with a resumption of work
10 in other areas as well).³⁷ Efforts must be made to reduce, as much as possible,
11 the negative atmosphere now surrounding possible contacts in the academic,
12 scientific, educational, youth, environmental and other spheres. Moreover,
13 there should be no interference in the joint work that various non-profit
14 organisations perform in both Russia and the EU. This would help foster trust
15 and create a general societal atmosphere that is conducive to the restoration
16 of cooperation.

17 **On the usefulness of old formats and agreements**

18 In conclusion, it is worth mentioning the usefulness of old formats of
19 cooperation and previous treaties and agreements. As Zagorsky rightly
20 notes, there is still no viable alternative to the cooperation mechanisms
21 established by the 1994 Partnership Cooperation Agreement between Russia
22 and the EU,³⁸ and one is unlikely to appear in the near future. After the
23 Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the EU halted the work of all official institutions and
24 mechanisms stipulated by the agreement, as well as those established later.
25 Some criticise the agreement as hopelessly outdated, and the previous
26 mechanisms for cooperation as inadequate and ineffective. In fact, they
27 provide the necessary and as yet only possible and legitimate framework for
28 restoring dialogue at the political and technical levels. They also retain the
29 potential to become more effective.³⁹ It would be in both sides' interest to hold
30 high-level Russia–EU summits twice yearly, to have meetings between the
31 Russian government and European Commission once every two years, and
32 to establish a Partnership Cooperation Agreement Permanent Council at the
33 relevant ministerial level, as well as a Parliamentary Cooperation Committee
34 and numerous industry-specific dialogues and working groups.

1 A high-level political dialogue within the framework of Russia–EU
2 summits could be useful for resolving current crises. Such a dialogue could,
3 for example, serve as a platform for discussing joint efforts for settling the
4 Ukrainian and Syrian crises. Renewing such summits would not mean that
5 the EU recognises Russia’s actions in Ukraine as legitimate. On the contrary,
6 it would enable the EU to exercise greater influence and enhance its position
7 in European and international politics. For Russia, the resumption of
8 dialogue at the highest political level would create additional incentives to
9 intensify efforts to resolve the crisis in eastern Ukraine, to achieve a phased
10 lifting of sanctions, and to restore normal, comprehensive cooperation with
11 the EU. As argued above, the parties could demonstrate a willingness to
12 compromise and hold a high-level constructive discussion on their main
13 point of contention – the crisis in eastern Ukraine – while maintaining all of
14 their positions of principle. Such a discussion could formulate general rules
15 for non-confrontational interaction in those regions, additional guarantees for
16 each side’s internal stability, and conditions for expanding civil contacts.
17 Reaching basic agreements on the thorniest issues would pave the way for
18 reinvigorating cooperation in trade, the economy, finance, technology,
19 security and others areas.

20 It would be best to start with a one-off, high-level Russia–EU summit,
21 preceded by efforts by Russia and the other ‘Normandy format’ participants
22 to achieve at least a modicum of progress towards settling the crisis in eastern
23 Ukraine – as demonstrated by a complete ceasefire and the resumption of
24 economic and social contacts there. Such progress would create the necessary
25 atmosphere for holding a summit. (A direct dialogue between the Russian
26 leadership and the new authorities in Kiev should also be established.) The
27 summit could produce a political declaration – prepared and coordinated in
28 advance – that contains the parties’ common positions on the main issues of
29 concern as well as steps for further joint action. The declaration could contain
30 two main parts, with the first focusing on key political and security issues
31 (the Ukrainian crisis, Syria, Iran, countries of the neighbourhood), and the
32 second on renewing and expanding the dialogue and practical cooperation in
33 specific areas that are important for both Russia and the EU. The parties
34 should also take steps to narrow the gap between them in these areas,

1 agreeing to resume dialogue at the ministerial and other relevant levels on
2 human rights, energy, counter-terrorism, security, migration, finance, the
3 economy, the harmonisation of regulation and technical standards, and the
4 establishment of official EU–EAEU relations.⁴⁰ As a starting point, it would
5 be enough to resume ministerial cooperation in 5–7 areas. Moreover, at this
6 stage, the parties could describe their efforts as temporary, without returning
7 to the full-fledged format of a Permanent Partnership Cooperation
8 Agreement Council.

9 Mogherini and Lavrov have already agreed that more regular Russia–EU
10 meetings at the foreign-ministerial level should take place.⁴¹ These meetings
11 should be held at least three times per year, have full-fledged agendas, and
12 produce practical decisions and recommendations for the Russian and EU
13 political leaderships. For the actual implementation of top-level political
14 decisions, working contacts should be resumed between the European
15 Commission and the Russian government, with the signing of mandatory
16 protocols for listing and implementing decisions.

17 It will not be possible to arrange for the lifting of all sanctions and counter-
18 sanctions before the crisis in eastern Ukraine is resolved, but the resumption
19 of formal dialogue at various levels, including the highest (albeit on a
20 temporary and limited basis), would help to restore trust, accelerate efforts
21 for settling crises, and facilitate cooperation in broad areas not covered by
22 sanctions, thereby creating the conditions for the sanctions' removal. Of
23 course, this type of temporary and limited form of cooperation is less
24 desirable than permanent, comprehensive and solidly institutionalised
25 cooperation, but it would be better than the current state of affairs.

26 In such a deep crisis in relations as this, it is vital that the parties respect
27 existing treaties, agreements and working papers such as 'roadmaps' so as to
28 maintain continuity in relations and to not lose the little that the parties had
29 managed to achieve in previous years. The issue of legitimacy is also
30 important: relying on existing legal and political documents will make it
31 easier to cope with the considerable forces in both the EU and Russia that
32 advocate a complete severing of relations.

33 This is particularly true of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe.
34 Russia's Foreign Policy Concept rightly characterises it as an 'independent

1 universal European organization with a mandate to provide for a single legal
 2 and humanitarian space on the continent through its unique convention
 3 mechanisms'.⁴² Russia has declared its commitment to work with the Council
 4 of Europe, as well as with the conventions adopted within its framework. The
 5 Council of Europe is especially important for normalising Russian–EU
 6 relations, and as a forum for expressing common values and cooperating in
 7 the humanitarian sphere. Thus, recent statements by Russian officials about
 8 the possibility of Moscow withdrawing from the council are unacceptable.⁴³

9 Russia and the EU need a strategic partnership. They share a broad
 10 foundation of common interests and projects, as well as significant experience
 11 working as partners. Even in the current climate, they should recognise those
 12 common interests and approaches, and reach compromises on the problems
 13 they face. Civil-society and economic interests are pushing the parties to
 14 normalise relations, and politicians should lose no time in doing so.

15 Notes

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