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**Looking East: The EU and Russia**

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## **Looking East: The EU and Russia<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The uncertainties in the new international order, marked by growing interdependence as a result of the processes of globalization, along with fragmentation tendencies in the form of secession and protectionism, together with the numerous threats to international security, contribute to the complexity of the international scenario, raising questions about cooperation and competition, the balancing of norms and interests, and the juxtaposition and coordination of objectives and resources. In this context, the clarification of the relationship between the European Union and its largest neighbor, the Russian Federation, through the identification of competing interests and cooperation opportunities, along with the analysis of the agendas of these distinct actors, are relevant for the understanding of the EU's eastern neighborhood policy in relation to Putin's Russia in a political-security perspective. Realizing they need one another, this relationship has, nevertheless, been marked by many ups and downs. To what extent might cooperation prevail in the midst of competing interests? How far might Putin's growing undemocratic practices affect Moscow's relations with the EU? What impact might the affirmation of a stronger EU security and defense capability have on the EU-Russia link? By seeking to find answers to these and other questions, this paper aims to analyze the complex context in which the EU-Russia relationship takes place, looking for possible ways ahead in the building of cooperation and in the finding of a balance necessary for constructing stability throughout Europe.

**Keywords:** securitization; competing interests; cooperation opportunities; European Union neighborhood; Russian Federation

### **Introduction**

The uncertainties in the new international order, marked by growing interdependence as a result of the processes of globalization, side-by-side with fragmentation tendencies, adding to the numerous threats to international security, such as organized crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and frail state structures, contribute to the complexity of the international scenario, raising questions about cooperation and competition, the balance of norms and interests, and the juxtaposition of objectives and resources. In this context, the clarification of the EU-Russia relationship in a post-enlargement context<sup>2</sup> assumes relevance.

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<sup>2</sup> Bulgaria and Romania still to join.

How has Russia been responding to the new security challenges? Adapting to the changing conditions in a post-cold war context, or changing its security perceptions in response to the European integration process/enlargement policy? And how far might Putin's growing undemocratic practices affect Moscow's relation with the EU? What impact might the affirmation of a stronger EU security and defense capability have on the EU-Russia link? A complex relationship based on distinct principles leaves ample room for cooperation and competition and for an acknowledgment of the benefits of a working strategic partnership, while precluding both the EU and Russia from assuming it as a declared goal, with persisting distrust and animosity. Partners and rivals in the same play: a complex argument where the actors' performance includes both collaborative initiatives and exchange of accusations, seeming like an almost unmanageable "love-hate" relationship.

In a rapidly changing world, the conceptualization of security should encompass the numerous challenges and different facets of international relations, including the traditional political-military dimension as well as social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects. In addition, the issue of security is transversal, involving international governmental and non-governmental actors and decision-making centers from the highest level of the state to its regional dimensions, taking place in a bilateral or multilateral context, as a way of responding to a multiplicity of relations, to pressure and leverage, and to direct, or at least, condition change. The feelings of insecurity associated to the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001 followed by attacks in Europe (such as in Madrid and London), as well as the various attacks in Russia, attest to the pertinence of this encompassing understanding of security, as well as the need for encompassing responses to these global threats.

This maturation in the conceptualization of security has been reflected in the way Russia and the EU relate to each other. The post-cold order has presented new rules to the international game, requiring adjustments to the new conditions. In this new setting, the Union has increasingly gained relevance and international capacity to act in external affairs, while Russia still struggles with how to deal with its new status after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, redefining goals, links and means.

The EU as a security community shares a set of values and norms built on a soft and multilateral approach to security issues, from which benefit-driven outputs are both an end and a self-sustaining factor, both for the Union and for the promotion of security in its vicinity. “If we consider security as a matter of dialogue, exchange, trust building and civilian action more than military superiority, then the EU has a role to play” (Charillon, 2005: 522). These soft security areas, where the EU has increasingly been gaining relevance, are fundamental as a basis for the Union’s involvement at the global level, and for its influence as a “normative model” (Youngs, 2002: 103; Walker, 2001: 78). The collective (the EU) and the individual (member states) are benefiting from the Europeanization of security policies, expressed in the new international context by the fact that the Union has increasingly been “exporting” its security model beyond its borders as a strategy of fostering stability in its neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> By a process of gradual socialization of security approaches, meaning a set of norms and values allowing an approximation to EU policies and ways of dealing, it aims at endorsing an enlarged security community in its still much unstable neighborhood.

However, and regarding Russia as its largest neighbor, this has not been a linear process. In fact, Russia has been resisting this *Europeanization* process, restraining from socializing a security conceptualization that it wants to be its own. This has been evinced in its reticence regarding the Wider Europe proposal and in its practices at home, independent and uncomfortable in the face of what it describes as external interferences. Thus, Russia would like to see a process where a true partnership, based on equality principles, would be rendered operational and become the engine for EU-Russia collaboration in various domains. “[W]e frankly warned our partners: should this add up to a new issue of the concept of buffer states, or ‘limitrofs’, which first appeared 100 years ago, nothing will come of it, as history has already shown us” (Chizhov, 2004: 85).

The institutionalization of a relationship based on regular contacts and the signing of agreements has not been accompanied by the clear sharing of values, norms and principles on policy procedures. In such a framing, this paper looks at the EU-Russia relationship through a political and security perspective, starting from the analysis of

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting analysis of the concept of “Europeanization” see Jorgensen, 2004: 48-50. For the EU relationship with its neighbors see Dannreuther (ed.), 2004.

different points of departure and understanding about the international setting, and elaborating on whether the finding of the necessary balance for constructing stability throughout Europe is possible in such conditions.

“Russia is one of the world’s largest countries, with a long history and rich cultural traditions. Despite the complicated international situation and internal problems, it continues to objectively play an important role in world processes, in view of its considerable economic, research-technical and military potential and unique situation on the Eurasian continent”.<sup>4</sup> There is a clear linkage between internal and external threats to security. At home, economic problems, corruption, organized crime, and terrorism, and at the international stage, competition for preponderance with the United States, seeking for a unilateral order which Russia opposes, and the EU gaining an increased role in international affairs. The Soviet imperial logic is still much present in Russian foreign policy: a logic of affirmation and regaining of influence. In this process, the contours of the EU-Russia agenda become tremulous. The values gap, the underlying norm setting differentiation, and the distinct understanding about (un)democratic practices render a common understanding about security and stability difficult. Dialogue seems in many instances an almost deaf talk, with Russian accusations of interference in its internal affairs and EU uneasiness about Russian practices at home and in neighboring countries. Thus, cooperation, competition and uncooperative practices underlie this unbalanced relationship.

The EU and Russia are two unequal partners, different actors with different agendas, not always easy to reconcile. While the EU is a regional organization with 25 member states, built on democratic principles, a multi-level decision-making system where individual interests do not necessarily coincide with the collective, particularly on foreign policy issues; the Russian Federation is a wide country with a unified policy and well defined political, strategic and economic interests, based on a strong hand at home and tough stance towards foreign issues considered vital to Russian interests, pursued in many instances outside the traditional contours of democratic practices. From these disparities in cohesion and internal political unity, as well as from the means to achieve them, there have been resulting difficulties in the building of a strategic partnership between the two sides.

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<sup>4</sup> *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation*, 17 December 1999.

Internal divisions in Russia, with the Euro-Atlanticists favoring closer ties to the United States and Europe, the Eurasianists looking at the eastern scenario for strategic alliances, including China and India in their horizons, and the Russia-first seeking to affirm Russian power on the basis of the country's imperial legacy, political strength, influence, and economic resources, the scenario at home reveals, in this very simplistic analysis, the divergences in discourse. President Putin's power and powerful voice in foreign policy have nevertheless managed to transform these divergences into a unified foreign policy, allowing more coherence in both wording and action.

Within the EU, the scenario is not one of unified and coordinated policies, with a multi-level decision-making system where the necessary bargaining for attaining common positions demonstrates how difficult it is to conciliate different visions and objectives of different national governments with different foreign policy visions. Differences with which Moscow plays to get support, attention and a winning strategy for its foreign policy goals. For example, the Moscow-Paris-Berlin axis in the Iraqi affair (2003), against the assertive posture of the United States, allowed the Kremlin to have a significant role in the transatlantic bargain. While cooperating with Washington, particularly after September 11, on terrorism related issues, Moscow does not preclude from criticizing the unilateralist stance of Washington's policy as countervailing international interests, and Russian interests in particular. In addition, Russia played with differences within the Union, with the old debate between the Europeanists and the Atlanticists resurfacing in the case of Iraq. Therefore, as a collective entity or in its national dimensions, Russia plays the EU game to its favor.

The Union strategy towards Russia is built over the principle of stabilization of its neighborhood, through the development of a bilateral constructive relationship with the authorities in Moscow. Therefore, the EU accords Russia a special place among its neighbors, to such an extent that it does not include the Russian Federation in its Neighborhood Policy package. Despite applying similar procedures and mechanisms to Russia to those envisaged in the Union's Neighborhood Policy, the fact of dealing with Russia in a separate framing demonstrates the relevance and weight Russian politics and actions have and which are recognized by the Union's member states. The drivers behind this bilateral relationship are not, however, clear: is it based on conventional

power logic and rivalry or on genuine civilian power? The fast changing tones in dialogue, from good neighborliness to mutual accusations and signs of distrust show how the marked differences between these two major actors cannot simply be rubbed out or painted with soft colors. The mixing in cooperative and competitive policies and approaches confers an interesting dimension to this relation: both acknowledge the relevance of the other, the strategic benefits arising from mutual understanding, and the possible gains from collaboration, not only for the two but for regional and global stability. But they also acknowledge deep differences in understandings and approaches. “As Alexander Motyl has put it, the gap between these states and the rest of Europe is *identitaire* and systemic, not because their identities are accepted as being non-European, and therefore different, but precisely because they are ‘European-plus’ – plus Slavic, plus Russian, plus *unique*” (Lynch, 2003: 35). In this context, the framing guidelines for the EU-Russia relationship are not tight or defined to suit. Much has been done, much is being done, but much is still to be done.

### **The EU-Russia relationship: background, developments and prospects**

The end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet bloc led to its dismemberment into 15 new republics including Russia, profoundly changing the European map, now sprinkled by several new states, some of which are independent for the first time. The Russian Federation inherited from the Soviet Union its diplomatic competencies, such as the seat at the United Nations Security Council, as well as nuclear capacity, remaining central and maintaining leverage power in the former Soviet space. The new relationship drawn between Russia and its new neighbors has been marked by difficulties in conciliating divergent interests, with Moscow generally seeking preponderance in an area it describes as of crucial strategic importance for its national interest. As for its relation with the United States and particularly the EU, it has been marked by undulation, with calm and tempestive waves overflowing the unbalanced search for conciliation of interests and procedures. There are enough ingredients for establishing a solid basis for cooperation, but there remain traces of the search for survival and dominance within this framework, shadowing over time this

relationship. The Russian approach towards its neighbors and Europe has been the result of shifts and adjustments in Russia's foreign policy formulations.

At first showing a desire to approximate and integrate into western structures, usually termed as the romantic period (1992 and early 1993), Moscow defined itself as a natural ally of Europe, joining Partnership for Peace, in the context of NATO, initiating talks with the Council of Europe and fostering cooperation with the EU. Relations between the European Community and the Soviet Union only overcame a minimal level with the rise of Mikhail Gorbachov to power, leading to the signature of a Trade and Cooperation Agreement in December 1989. The revolutions of 1989-1991 required a more proactive response from Europe to the new challenges, which allowed the establishment of cooperation and financial assistance programs to transition, such as PHARE or TACIS in December 1991. But cooperation with Russia would only be effective and visible from June 1994, when the EU and Russia signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) at Corfu. Generically, the PCA envisages cooperation in different areas with the goal of integrating Russia in the wider area of cooperation in Europe, the promotion of security and international peace, development of a democratic society, a spirit of partnership and cooperation, and the strengthening of trade, economic, political and cultural ties. It also envisages the establishment of a free trade area between the EU and Russia.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by the drafting of the EU strategy towards Russia.

In December 1995, at the Madrid European Council, the first EU strategy towards Russia was drafted with the aim to "provide the EU with an analysis of its interests with regard to Russia; to generate guidelines for policy; and to identify future areas of cooperation in all three pillars of the European Union" (Haukkala, 2003: 11). This reflected the Union's acknowledgement of the new post-cold war context and of the importance of a stable Russia in its proximity, with rapprochement built upon the need for economic assistance. Regarding its new neighbors, Moscow kept an introspective attitude, focusing on its own problems. However, the western aid proved insufficient, and the conditionality principles associated to it generated anti-western feelings, in particular among the more conservative elite. Growing disenchantment was explored by

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<sup>5</sup> [www.europe.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/ceeca/pca/pca\\_russia.pdf](http://www.europe.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ceeca/pca/pca_russia.pdf).

the nationalists and communists who pressured Boris Yeltsin and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Andrei Kozyrev, for a change in policies. Severe criticism about western interference in Russian affairs, including claims of mistreatment of Russian citizens abroad, particularly in neighboring republics, sustained the demands for further interventionism by the central authorities in Moscow.

In a new phase of its internal and external policy, Russia sought to reaffirm its power in its traditional area of influence, maintaining economic influence, political pressure and a considerable presence in military terms in some of these republics. This period (1993-1995), which might be labeled as the reaffirmation phase, expressed the Russian nationalist aspirations at affirmation as a great power while promoting so-called democratic principles, revealing a mixture of power politics, leverage and managed democracy, resulting in a picture whose traces are difficult to grasp. Moscow aimed at becoming the “guarantor of stability” in the area, maintaining a tough stance at home, as evinced in the Chechen war, and intending to be recognized as the legitimate protector of its neighboring republics. In this way, the former Soviet space was defined as an area of strategic national interest,<sup>6</sup> and the influence of third countries was not welcomed. Moscow adopted a more interventionist posture, justified as a way of diminishing the threats the country faced, such as organized crime and civil unrest.

Although by 1995 the West’s relationship with Russia had improved, of which the signature of the PCA is an example, there were delicate subjects that remained problematic, in particular regarding the eastern enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and of the EU, understood in Moscow as a direct threat to its interests. In a speech at the United Nations in 1995, Yeltsin appealed to a more ample framing of European security, if possible through the strengthening of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), more than to an expansion of alliances which could conduct to a new confrontation. The new Duma, elected by year’s end, with a stronger communist presence, meant less popular support for pro-western politics in comparison to the first years of post-communist administration.

In early 1996, Andrei Kozyrev was replaced by Yevgeni Primakov in the foreign affairs ministry. Primakov conferred a new direction on the Kremlin’s policies,

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<sup>6</sup> *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 28 June 2000.

demonstrated by the search for parity with the United States, the cooling of the rapprochement to Europe and centered more in the former Soviet space. Less pro-western, Moscow launched a pragmatic policy, searching for more effective answers to the problems it faced. New economic and social reforms were defined at home, and the search for solutions to the ongoing armed conflicts in the former Soviet area gained added relevance. This approach was pursued both within the Federation, with Chechnya as the “aching heel” of Russian policy, but also regarding its neighboring republics, where Moscow had been directly involved in armed hostilities in places like Moldova and Georgia. After direct meddling in these conflicts, Moscow assumed now the role of an impartial mediator, raising nevertheless doubts about its credibility for such a task. Its new posture was nevertheless translated into a change in its politics of intervention, adding to its political-military dimension the search for consensus, revealing a new understanding in the Kremlin that the resolution of these conflicts would bring benefits to Moscow. However, there were still many questions about how and what. Nevertheless, this change in Russian decision-making allowed the PCA, signed back in 1994, to finally enter into force in December 1997. This waiting period coincided with the cooling of relations between the European Union and Russia due to the war in Chechnya.

The difficulties in the relationship with Europe were further aggravated by the armed intervention of NATO in former Yugoslavia, where the historical ties of Russia with the Serbians could not be ignored. Sanctions were, for that reason, not welcomed in the Russian Duma, and even among more moderate opinions there was anxiety about NATO extending its activities beyond its natural borders, independently of what Russia or others might think. There was indignation, particularly when NATO launched air attacks against the Bosnian Serbs without consulting the Kremlin, who after all was also a member of the United Nations Security Council. Boris Yeltsin described the attack in the spring of 1999 as an “act of aggression” that could lead to enlarged armed conflict in the Balkans, while his minister for foreign affairs described it as “genocide”. Russian mediation helped in ending the conflict, but not without leaving traces of tension in the relationship of Russia with the West.

On 4 June 1999 the EU Common Strategy on Russia was launched in Cologne, setting the basis for a “strategic partnership”, as a way of responding to the mounting

tensions that shadowed this relationship, with the Chechen issue and former Yugoslavia on top of the discord. It intended the development of a stable, open and plural Russia on the basis of principles of the rule of law and market economy, as a way of promoting enlarged stability in Europe, global security and respond to the common challenges of the continent through intensified cooperation with Russia. It represents the most consistent effort at coordination of European policies and programs towards Russia, defining objectives as well as drawing immediate priorities for action. The political message is evident: a stable Russia governed by democratic principles at the EU borders. However, the strategy will only have practical relevance if “Russia think Europe and if Europe think Russia”, meaning mutual and sincere commitment to the development of this relationship (Nyberg, 1999). This strategy is different from the 1995 document in that it clearly states soft security threats, and that EU-Russia cooperation promotes not only regional but also global security (Haukkala, 2003: 13). However, this identification of common threats does not mean a common understanding about the ways of dealing with them.

Moscow responded in October of the same year with the adoption of a document about the Medium Term Strategy for Development of Relations with the European Union.<sup>7</sup> The document aims at assuring national interests and expands the image of Russia in Europe as a reliable partner in the building of a system of collective security, while mobilizing the potential and experience of the EU in the promotion of the Russian market economy and in the development of democratic processes in the country. In addition, it envisages strategic cooperation in the prevention and search for solution to local conflicts, with emphasis on international law and peaceful means. In this way, it envisages a unified Europe, without dividing lines, and the balanced and integrated strengthening of the positions of the Russian Federation and Europe regarding the most pressing issues affecting the international community in the new century. According to the document, the proposed objectives are in line with the European strategy towards Russia.

However, if at first sight the two documents seem to be in alignment, looking at them more carefully reveals after all some misalignment. The “EU focuses on values and Russia’s need to change profoundly, while the Russian document stresses national

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<sup>7</sup> In <[www.eur.ru/eng/neweur/user\\_eng.php?func=apage&id=53](http://www.eur.ru/eng/neweur/user_eng.php?func=apage&id=53)>.

interests and sovereignty. The CSR [Common Strategy on Russia] is vague, while the Russian strategy is quite specific” (Lynch, 2003: 59), revealing the pragmatic and realist tone Russian foreign policy has been assuming. This distant way of formulating guiding principles remains very present in the EU-Russia relationship, showing both the distance in the underlying conceptualizations about values and norms and the difficulties in understanding the “other”. The complex EU structure and multi-level decision-making dynamics render it an opaque partner, while the Russian way of formulating policies and its precarious commitment to many international principles shows its obscure side. Difficulties in understanding that persist in time.

On 31 December 1999, Yeltsin resigned from the presidency. His interim successor, Vladimir Putin, was elected as the new president of the Russian Federation in March 2000, suggesting both expressions of support about his realist look at Russian politics, and criticism about his tough stance at home and abroad. Generally, Putin seeks to maintain a privileged relationship with the West,<sup>8</sup> though the Chechen issue has been rendering difficult this cooperative attitude, regarding strong western criticism to the violation of basic principles and of human rights in the separatist republic. However, the events of September 11, 2001, and the global fight against terrorism changed the scenario in favor of Putin, giving him grounds to justify his repressive actions in Chechnya as part of this fight against terror, which became a priority in Russian foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, western criticism of disrespect for and violation of human rights in the republic, particularly those coming from Washington, was almost silenced. Putin’s Russia assumed clearly realist traces, recognizing its weaknesses and searching for the revitalization of the state, with September 11 revealing itself as an accelerator of this tendency (Lynch, 2003: 9). The concrete realization that Russia could not do much in the face of inevitable developments, such as EU and NATO enlargement, made Russia change its discourse since direct confrontation could poison its relationship with the West and lead to isolation and consequently add to the country’s fragility. Putin realized

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<sup>8</sup> “The Russian Federation views the EU as one of its main political and economic partners and will strive to develop with it an intensive, stable and long-term cooperation devoid of expediency fluctuations. (...) Interaction with states of Western Europe, primarily with such influential ones as Britain, Germany, Italy and France, represents an important resource for Russia’s defense of its national interests in European and world affairs, and for the stabilization and growth of the Russian economy”. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 28 June 2000.

<sup>9</sup> “Russia regards as its most important foreign policy task to combat international terrorism which is capable of destabilizing the situation not only in individual states, but in entire regions”. *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 28 June 2000.

the fundamental link between the internal and external dimensions as essential for the building of stability in Russia. The 2001 attacks and the global fight against terror were used by the Russian president in this search for realignment with the West, and in reaffirmation of its international political status as promoter of decision and influence in international politics. “Integration processes, in particular, in the Euro-Atlantic region are quite often pursued on a selective and limited basis. Attempts to belittle the role of a sovereign state as the fundamental element of international relations generate a threat of arbitrary interference in internal affairs”,<sup>10</sup> to which Putin responded in his usual cool and pragmatic way, underlining the potential role of Russia as a regional power.

The diminishing of NATO’s role following the US unilateral moves after September 11 has contributed to a downgrading of the organization’s relevance in Russian politics, and to improvement in bilateral contacts between Washington and Moscow. In fact, Washington has been showing a less critical approach than the EU regarding internal politics in Russia. The EU has maintained a more active and less reserved attitude, openly criticizing the ambiguity and dualism inherent to the opposition between “strategy” and “democracy” in Russia, an attitude which has been causing problems to this relationship (Lynch, 2003: 57). The EU has been following a policy of influence over Russian internal developments through the definition of concessions and bargains in the face of shared interests and objectives. A policy of “giving, but”, which intends, through the introduction of conditionality elements, to pressure Russia in delicate matters, in particular regarding human rights and democratization.

Internally, the consolidation of presidential power in Russia and the discourse of combating corruption and the power of corrupt elites has found popular support. Whether these new policies of containment and power centralization reveal an effective fight against parallel activities which invalidate any democratic effort, or are rather the reflex of the will to control and return to an imperial past, are open questions in need of clarification. These measures of centralization have been criticized in Europe as a sign of backwardness regarding the democratic process and the return to the authoritarian Soviet-style model of government. However, if stability and internal order require an

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<sup>10</sup> *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 28 June 2000.

authoritarian course, maybe a non-democratic but stable Russia is preferable in the Union's periphery – as long as dialogue and a platform for cooperation are possible.

For Russia, the primary threat to its own security comes from within: it is the menace of civil unrest and violence within its borders, such as the most cited case of Chechnya. And it is followed by developments in its near abroad, defined as an area of vital interest to Russian foreign policy interests. In this political orientation, there seems to be a clear recognition by the authorities in Moscow that the Russian geostrategic power is under threat. This feeling of vulnerability, with concrete justification in the wider involvement of other actors in its neighboring area, generally described as a traditional area of Russian influence, explains the Russian collaborative approach. It is a way of preserving international security, according to the Russian model, signing accords and defining the level of western engagement in the former Soviet space, which Russia only acquiesces to when convenient. This new posture means a multilateral attitude towards its multiple security problems, but it also seems to be a way of counterbalancing Washington's unilateral hegemonic policy. And if this is a strategy to oppose Washington's moves, than it might not be consistent enough.

“The essence of Russian policy under Putin, therefore, has little to do with Kozyrev's pursuit of pro-Westernism in the early 1990s, where Russia was to merge into the Western ‘family of civilized countries’. Current policy has a much sharper edge. Russian differences with the West have not disappeared. Simply, Putin has decided that they are best resolved with Russia comfortably inside the tent rather than with one foot jammed in the doorway. Russia's changes in foreign policy since 11 September, therefore, are based on calculations of priority and interest, where risk is distinguished from threat and real needs are separate from false ambitions” (Lynch, 2003: 29-30).

This realism in Russian policy clashes in many instances with the soft power and normative idealism proclaimed in the EU house. But despite differences, Moscow and Brussels recognize the relevance of a “strategic partnership”. At the Thessalonica Council in June 2003, Javier Solana presented his proposal of a Security Strategy to the plenary – “A Secure Europe in a Better World” – defining the general principles for common external action, identifying as the main threats to peace and security the spread

of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, failed states and terrorism. The priorities identified include the extension of the zone of peace and security to all of Europe; promotion of effective multilateralism, through the strengthening of the international order and on the basis of multilateral institutions and international law; and response to the new threats to security, focusing on its dynamic character and on the need to deal with them in a preventive way, through political and economic means (Solana, 2003). To achieve these objectives, the Union's foreign policy has to be more active, more coherent (better coordination between the different decision-making levels), more capable (regarding the management of crisis, diplomatic capabilities and means of information), and developed in collaboration with other partners, in particular the United States through the deepening of the transatlantic relationship, but also with countries such as Russia.

The EU Neighborhood Policy includes six countries from the former Soviet space (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and from the southern Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and nine plus one in the Mediterranean area (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia plus the Palestinian Authority). The aim of the program is the sharing of the benefits of enlargement with these states, offering them a privileged relationship with the EU, as a way of promoting stability, well-being and security – defined by the three Ps: proximity, prosperity and poverty –, independently of these countries being members of the organization or even candidate countries. It aims at avoiding, in this way, dividing lines between an enlarged Europe and its new neighbors, directly responding to the objective of the European Security Strategy of building stability in the Union's neighborhood. "The privileged relationship with neighbors will build on mutual commitment to common values principally within the fields of the rule of law, good governance, the respect for human rights, including minority rights, the promotion of good neighborly relations, and the principles of market economy and sustainable development. Commitments will also be sought to certain essential aspects of the EU's external action, including, in particular, the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as abidance by international law and efforts to achieve conflict resolution".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Communication from the Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, COM (2004) 373 final, 12 May 2004, p. 3.

Russia is not a part of this policy, having a different framing for its relationship with the Union, which demonstrates a recognition of its special status. However, this relationship is developed according to the principles of the European Neighborhood Policy and following the same financial support scheme.<sup>12</sup>

The European Neighborhood Policy is thus closely linked to the rapprochement between the EU and Russia. Firstly drafted as a Communication by the European Commission about an enlarged Europe in March 2003 and further consolidated in July of the same year,<sup>13</sup> it offers cooperation in three particular areas: political, human, civil and cultural; security; and sustainable economic and social development, aiming at the establishment of a “ring of solidarity” in the EU borders. Russia has, however, not been showing much enthusiasm about this wider Europe proposal, since Moscow does not envisage more than a special relationship with the EU. It wants ability to maneuver in its near abroad and understands this neighborhood policy as eventually having direct implication in its interests in the former Soviet area.

Allowing different interpretations, the Wider Europe policy has suggested as different understandings as the following: “mitigation of negative enlargement impacts on new border regions; rhetorical, low cost diplomacy to try and placate the excluded; transformation of the states of the rest of Europe in line with common European values and with the benefits of progressive integration. The first objective is worthwhile but not strategic. The second is unworthy cynicism, to be rejected. The third is the strategic objective, which political scientists term ‘Europeanization’” (Emerson, 2004). However, the Russian response has been cautious and showing restraint.

In May 2004 a “Strategy Paper” was approved defining closer collaboration between the Union and its neighbors, and including the drafting of “Country Reports” with a bilateral character and according to the most pressing needs of each of these countries, reflecting the political, economic, social and institutional situation in these countries as a basis for the definition of Action Plans. These “suited to fit” Action Plans

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<sup>12</sup> Communication from the Commission, *Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument*, COM(2003) 393 final, 1 July 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Communication from the Commission, *Wider Europe Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003) 104, 11 March 2003; Communication from the Commission, *Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, 1 July 2003.

aim at bridging the differences between needs and capabilities, establishing concrete and simultaneously ambitious targets in distinct areas for an integrated development of each of these partners, particularly in the process of political-economic and democratic transition. According to EU sources, these measures allow the building of an enlarged area of stability and security on the basis of confidence and the sharing of common values, eventually allowing more efficacy in the combat against the new menaces, particularly terrorism and organized crime. However, “an Action Plan with Russia would only be part of the overall ‘strategic partnership’, which includes the Energy Dialogue and talks on a Common European Economic Space. It is unlikely that Russia will agree to a national Action Plan on the lines proposed, precisely because it would lead to greater EU engagement and, therefore, interference in Russian affairs (sectoral action plans might however be possible)” (Lynch, 2003a: 55).

Relations between the sides are highly institutionalized, with contacts at various levels, including two annual summits at the highest level (one in Russia and the other in the country holding the EU presidency); ministerial contacts at the Permanent Partnership Council level (replacing from June 2003 the former Cooperation Council)<sup>14</sup> which gathers in different subject areas, such as Justice and Home Affairs, Environment, and Energy; involves contacts at parliamentary level through the Committee of Parliamentary Cooperation, between the European Parliament and the Duma; and *troika* meetings, with political directors from the Russian Federation, the state member presiding the Union, as well as his follower, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana, the Secretariat of the Council and the European Commission. To facilitate the establishment of all these contacts, Moscow formalized the Russian Inter-Ministerial Commission for Cooperation with the EU in October 2000. But quantity does not necessarily mean quality, and this abundance of contacts does not match influence and effectiveness in results. Russia and the EU share concerns which pave the way for collaboration on a number of issues, but they also compete on various questions, causing restraint and allowing uneasiness in their relation.

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<sup>14</sup> Decision made at the St. Petersburg Summit, 31 May 2003.

Concerted action between the two demanded a revision and readaptation of the PCA to the new post-enlargement context. A first step in this direction was the extension of the accord to the new members,<sup>15</sup> in such a way that the privileged relationship Moscow had with the Union was extended also to the new members. It should be noted that many of these states were till then preferential trade partners of Russia, a status that to some extent is in this way maintained. The EU is a main trade and economic partner for Russia, carrying also strategic weight, as evinced in the Energy Dialogue established at the EU-Russia Summit in October 2000 (though the results have so far been modest) (Likhachev, 2004: 81).

In addition, the EU has sought a more active Russian involvement in security actions of the Union, such as for example the integration of Russian forces in EU missions, such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For Moscow, this involvement is important, clearly demonstrating its understanding that a European security and defense policy which does not interfere in its vital issues and to some extent counterbalances and minimizes the presence of NATO is welcomed in Russia. But the way it has been conducted has generated discomfort in Russia. “[T]he EU makes decisions on the conduct of peacekeeping operations, while relegating Russia to observer status. I can say frankly that our cooperation on such a basis will flounder, going nowhere. We participate in the EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but this is the first and only case of such participation. We have already declined the EU invitation to take part in several other peacekeeping and policing operations. I believe that our response to subsequent proposals will be the same unless we agree on an acceptable format for crisis management operations that takes into account the interests of all participants” (Chizlov, 2004: 137). A clear evidence of the differences in understanding resulting from distinct conceptualizations about security and normative considerations. But in the midst of differences, there has also been room for collaboration.

There has been progress in the Kaliningrad issue with agreement reached in November 2002<sup>16</sup> and consolidated in May 2004 regarding the construction of a high speed train and easiness of procedures on the part of the Union regarding the transit of Russian citizens between the exclave and the Russian Federation. Around the same time a bilateral

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<sup>15</sup> Signed on 27 April 2004, it entered into force in October of the same year.

<sup>16</sup> *Joint Statement on Transit between the Kaliningrad Region and the Rest of the Russian Federation*, Brussels, 11 November 2002.

protocol was concluded regarding Russian integration into the World Trade Organization. Earlier, in November 2003, a Joint Declaration was signed in Rome between the EU and Russia on strengthening dialogue and cooperation on political and security matters, with its first practical results, although modest ones, in Russia's involvement in the EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. On its part, Russia ratified the Kyoto Protocol, allowing its entry into force in February 2005. It seems that concessions are becoming clearer in a relationship built over fragile foundations, in the sense that there is a disparity of values and principles that sustain them. A trading of concessions that allow us to say that "Russia and the EU are not still having their honeymoon".<sup>17</sup>

On 1 March 2005, the first round of contacts took place in Luxembourg regarding human rights, minorities and fundamental rights, opening the doors to the debate of a polemic theme which has been in the disagreement agenda of Russia and the EU. While a first step in the long road ahead, it remained as such with minimal developments and eventually even on the basis of a one step forward, two steps backwards. But the sharing of concerns is certainly a positive common ground to start with. "Soft security threats from Russia are a serious concern for the EU and require continued engagement – nuclear safety, the fight against crime, including drug trafficking and illegal immigration, the spread of disease and environmental pollution",<sup>18</sup> are just a few examples.

At the Moscow Summit on 10 May 2005, an agreement on four common spaces was signed, having as a goal to build a Europe without dividing lines, built around four areas of cooperation, including a common economic space; a common space of liberty, security and justice; a common space of cooperation in the field of external security; and a common space of research, education and culture. It is a non-binding agreement which aims at the creation of a common market between the EU and Russia without barriers to trade. Cooperation is envisaged in financial services, transports, communications, energy and environment, as well as on humanitarian and security issues. But these principles need to be translated into concrete actions. A goal difficult to attain when themes of discord remain, hampering rapprochement between Moscow and Brussels and giving

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<sup>17</sup> Luxemburg prime minister cited in "EU, Russia ink deal in bid to end disputes", *Euractiv.com*, 11 May 2005.

<sup>18</sup> *Country Strategy Paper 2000-2006, National Indicative Programme, 2002-2003, Russian Federation*, European Commission, 27 December 2001.

these commitments not much more than minimal practical translation so far. Dissension runs through a wide range of aspects including democratic issues and human rights, of which Chechnya and criticism regarding the way Russia handled the Beslan hostage crisis are examples. Border control, migration policies, visa regimes, corruption, veterinary certificates, aviation royalties, the settlement of border questions with Estonia and Latvia, and the presidential elections in Ukraine add to disagreement.

### **Searching for balance in an unbalanced relationship: an assessment**

Besides finding internal balance, when dealing with the challenges to international security, the EU should take into account its new geographical limits, extended to the Russian border, and having as outsiders Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. Support to transition efforts in these countries, a complex challenge regarding the complex socio-economic situation in Moldova, and the despotic regime of Lukashenko in Belarus, for example, might constitute an important step forward in the strengthening of European security, promoting transparency and democratic principles while fighting the illegal trade in arms, drugs and alcohol, and corruption, favorable practices to an unstable governance and to the development of terrorist groups.

In fact, the civic and political-economic role of the EU, including policing, promotion of the rule of law, aid to development, respect for human rights, and good governance (the so-called *soft* areas), has made a difference in many corners of the world. As such, the EU response to new and old challenges has been built mainly through non-military means, on the basis of soft security principles. “As the world’s largest trading power; as the biggest donor of humanitarian assistance; and as the source of 70% of all development aid, the EU seems uniquely endowed with respect to non-military conflict management” (Sangiovanni, 2003: 200).

However, the formula “the US fight, the UN feed and the EU pays”, according to which the EU should concentrate itself in its soft dimension of security leaving to the US the hard dimension (material capability and military resources), is not sufficient to face the current challenges. The EU has to develop further its capabilities in terms of

*hard power*, while taking into account the relevance of *soft power* in the fight against the current threats, such as illegal practices, corruption and failed states. The civil dimension combined with strong economic measures is a fundamental piece in the democratic puzzle and in the building of stability, for which the EU might contribute in a positive way. The ways in which Russia reacts to this strengthening of the Union regarding its military capacity reveals an ambiguous posture of support if this means a counterbalance to NATO and the United States, but also of distrust for a powerful neighbor that might be seen more as an adversary than as a partner. “Russian policy is pro-Russian and not pro-Western; the strategy of alignment is a means to an end. The most important end is that of domestic revitalization” (Lynch, 2003: 94). Thus, there is a clear tension between the expansion of the normative agenda of the EU and the considerations of Russian power politics (Timmins, 2003: 78-79).

In this relationship, the conducting of dialogue and the implementation of initiatives must be sufficiently clear to dismiss Russian fears about EU enlargement, which have risen with the diminution of Moscow’s power in the world stage. “The difference between civilian power and soft imperialism lies in the overall importance of values and norms, and also whether negotiations are carried out in a symmetric, dialogical way rather than by imposition. (...) By soft imperialism we refer to soft power applied in a hard way, that is an asymmetric form of dialogue or even the imposition of strategic use of norms and conditionalities enforced for reasons of self-interest rather than for the creation of a genuine (interregional) dialogue” (Hettne and Soderbaum, 2005: 538-9). Neither side sees its interests as best served by excluding the other, but they also realize the need to deepen cooperation. President Putin has mentioned the need to improve the efficiency and quality of this cooperation (Lynch, 2003: 18). However, always following a realist perspective: whenever in some way Russian vital interests might be under threat, Moscow does not cooperate. Thus, interest, compromise and rational calculation of opportunities and benefits underlie cooperation.

## **Conclusion**

The relationship with Russia has been marked by ups and downs, according to developments in the international scene. However, generically, its evolution has been showing signs of progress, demonstrating the recognition that partnership and cooperation are necessary despite the remaining divergences in an increasingly volatile and unstable scenario. Transnational phenomena such as terrorism, organized crime, illicit activities and trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings, are shared problems. In addition, more pragmatic aspects, such as the fact of sharing a common border of over 1 500 kilometers, of more than 50% of trade exchanges being made with the EU, of Russia being the highest provider of hydrocarbonates to the EU, as well as a fundamental source of energetic resources, of Russia consisting of a great market presenting high potential for the Union, despite its still fragile economy, of Russia wishing to integrate the World Trade Organization, or even the influence that Moscow still exerts over some of the states in the former Soviet space, maintaining in some cases substantial military presences (Moldova and Georgia are cases in point), are fundamental aspects that demonstrate the positive sum game that might result from dialogue, and from its much needed translation into effective forms of collaboration.

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