

This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 02 Oct 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy

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The European Union

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315536934-19>

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Published online on: 29 Mar 2018

How to cite :- Tuomas Forsberg, Hiski Haukkala. 29 Mar 2018, *The European Union from:* Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy Routledge

Accessed on: 02 Oct 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315536934-19>

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THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Russia's relationship with Europe – or the other European Great Powers and their alliances – has historically constituted the key direction of Russia's foreign policy shaping the identity of the country (Neumann, 2017). After the end of the Cold War, the EU has been Russia's most significant partner on a broad field of issues and has signified this historical continuity, although bilateral relations also exist and "Europe" remains bigger than the EU (Jonsson, 2012). Since the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the relationship has become more confrontational and has arguably reached a watershed. The future remains uncertain, but for this reason it is important to revisit Russian policy towards the EU over this period. As we will discuss in this chapter, there is both continuity and change in Russian policy towards the EU. Russia's foreign policy towards the EU can also be explained through various approaches and theories, of which the most prominent can be related to power relations, domestic politics, culture and identities as well as psychological factors. Academic research on Russian foreign policy has progressed, but it remains a contested field and suffers from the political sensitivities associated with the topic.

Research on Russia-EU relations

During the more than 20 years that Russia-EU relations have existed in the institutional sense, the scholarly literature on the topic has expanded. To a large extent, research on Russia's policy towards the EU has been descriptive and/or prescriptive, and policy-oriented in nature. Much of the extant research offered up-to-date analysis of the changing agendas in Russia-EU relations, either after or before major summits or other significant events such as the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. Various think tanks and research institutes have been at least as visible in producing such knowledge as universities.

The research on Russia-EU relations has posited some general explanations related to the overall nature and development of the relationship focusing more often on the problems rather than on cooperation (Prozorov, 2006; Pursiainen, 2008; Haukkala, 2010; Sergunin, 2016). There are also many issue-specific attempts at explication related to fields such as security or energy cooperation. Although many theoretical perspectives have been applied to Russia's policy towards the EU, there is no single paradigm that currently guides the analysis. Analysts have focused on the power struggle and economic interdependence as well as identities and worldviews as the key factors influencing and shaping the relationship. Often such explanations are embedded in the analysis, but they are

only rarely systematically developed, tested or contrasted with alternative explanations. The puzzle remains whether the same theory can explain both conflict and cooperation and the variation over time. Typically, explanations of Russian foreign policy towards the EU are singular, ad hoc, and related to events and political leaders rather than general patterns or complex mechanisms.

In general, the Russia-EU relations have often been approached more from the European than Russian perspective, and Russia has been seen as the object rather than the subject of various policies. Nevertheless, relations with the EU form a central part of research over Russian foreign policy. Historically, key schools of thought in Russian foreign policy have been distinguished on the basis of their views of Europe. Even today, Europe is at the core of Russian foreign policy formulation despite of its focus on the Eurasian Union or rhetoric of an Asian pivot and the importance given to BRICS cooperation. The issues of the enlargement, foreign policy and economic cooperation have dominated scholarly discussion in Russia. Russian EU studies have been characterized by their emphasis on empirics, realism and limited engagement with Western scholarly discourses (Romanova, 2015).

Evolution of Russian policy towards the EU

We can distinguish six periods or phases in Russian policy towards the EU (Forsberg and Haukkala, 2016; see also Thorun, 2009). These phases mostly correspond with the terms of the Russian presidents, but they also coincide with some major international events marking the shifts in policy.

The first period (1992–1994) was the formative phase of Russia's relations with the EU. At the time, Russia's foreign policy was oriented towards the West and one of the main priorities of Russia was to establish cooperative relations with the key Western actors on an institutional basis. During this phase Russia and the EU negotiated and finally agreed the contractual foundations of relations in the form of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The Agreement was signed on June 24, 1994 on the fringes of the Corfu European Council. It was fundamentally different from the previous forms of agreement that the EU had had with the countries of the former Soviet Union. Although the PCA was primarily an economic agreement, it was much more wide-ranging and ambitious in its scope. In the agreement, the economic aspects of the relationship are complemented with a range of other sectors – including political dialogue; social and cultural cooperation; education, science and technology – with a view to providing a 'framework for the gradual integration between Russia and a wider area of cooperation in Europe' (PCA, Article 1). This was indeed a much more ambitious agenda for rapprochement and convergence compared with mere trade and cooperation as envisaged by the PCA. The Russians were driving a hard bargain, basically refusing to take any of the European Commission's (EC) proposals at face value. This was the case especially in the economic field where Russia repeatedly pushed for more trade concessions and a more generous long-term perspective in the form of a free trade area than what was envisaged in the Commission's original mandate. Further, the EC's insistence on political conditionality was a source of concern for the Russians, resulting in additional difficulties in the negotiation process. Second, the EC was less than forthcoming in meeting the Russian demands. Some member states in particular were slow to respond to the Russian requests and when they did so, it was usually in response to the domestic difficulties that the increasingly beleaguered President Yeltsin and his team of reformers were facing in Russia. In essence, the EC was constantly fearful of 'losing' Russia, which could have resulted in a rollback of Russian democracy and economic reforms in the country.

In the second phase (1994–2000), Russia's overall foreign policy started to change from the pro-Western orientation towards an emphasis on multiple partnerships. Not only did the importance of the West as a partner diminish on a general level, but the relationship with the EU faced

serious concrete problems in putting the agreed mechanisms in place. Due to the First Chechen War, the ratification of the PCA was delayed by three years. At the same time, Russia had already started to question the very basis on which it was negotiated. In spite of this, cooperation with the EU was still seen as highly desirable. Even far-reaching objectives were not excluded at the time, as exemplified in the words of the then Prime Minister, Victor Chernomyrdin, who declared that “our entire scope of work is directed toward one objective – that Russia can become a member of the EU-Russia” (quoted in Forsberg and Haukkala, 2016: 22). Yet, in actual fact, the window to kick-start relations proved to be fleeting. In August 1998, the Russian economy was in free fall, forcing the Russian government to default on its debts and allowing the rouble to devalue in an uncontrolled manner. To all intents and purposes this setback was seen as a mortal blow to Russia’s successful transition to a working and growing market economy. The Kosovo war in 1999 – although not a particular crisis between the EU and Russia per se (see Maass, 2016: ch. 1), as it was a NATO operation with the United States bearing the main responsibility – nevertheless burdened Russia’s view of the West in general. A renewed break in the relations was caused by the Second Chechen War in 1999, as the EU regarded Russia’s use of force as a violation of earlier commitments, disproportionate and hindering a political solution to the crisis.

The strains, however, soon dissipated and the third phase in Russia’s policy towards the EU, coinciding with Putin’s first term as President of Russia (2000–2004), was generally marked by optimism and progress in developing Russia-EU relations, particularly in the beginning. Putin’s “European vocation” was perceived to be guiding his foreign policy orientation. The positive attitude towards the EU was plain, for example, in Putin’s famous speech delivered in German at the *Bundestag* in 2001. “As for European integration”, Putin declared, “we not just support[ing] these processes, but we are looking to them with hope”. On this basis, Russia was eager to develop relations with the EU, and out of these efforts, the idea of Four Common Spaces that became the landmark of the relations was created. The negotiations over the content of the document started in 2001 and the document was accepted at the St. Petersburg Summit in May 2003:

- 1 The Common Economic Space, covering economic issues and the environment.
- 2 The Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice.
- 3 The Common Space of External Security, including crisis management and non-proliferation.
- 4 The Common Space of Research and Education, including cultural aspects.

Discord started to increase again during Putin’s second presidency (2004–2008), a period that can be seen as the fourth phase in the relations. As Dmitry Trenin (2006) declared in his *Foreign Affairs* article, “Russia’s leaders have given up on becoming part of the West and have started creating their own Moscow-centered system”. Surely, Russia was still interested in developing relations with the EU, but it was much more concerned that it should take place on the basis of equality and reciprocity in terms of searching for compromised solutions where both parties moved (Likhachev, 2006). The four “common spaces” were still elaborated at the Moscow Summit in May 2005, when the parties agreed on “road maps” on how these common spaces were to be put into effect, but the negotiations proved to be difficult. The problems manifested in trade disputes, security cooperation and clashes over values. As a result, the relations stagnated and the parties were not able to renegotiate the PCA that was meant to expire in 2007.

There is probably no single overwhelming reason why Russia’s, and President Putin’s attitude to be more precise, towards the EU started to cool after the initial years. The problems related to EU enlargement and the right of Russians to travel between Kaliningrad and the rest of Russia without visa was still solved on the basis of a compromise. Yet, the Russians started to feel that the European

leaders and opinion builders were not treating Russia in a fair way, but were criticizing Russian conduct in all kinds of situations, be it the siege of the school in Beslan or the arrest of the leading oligarch of the time, Mikhail Khodorkovsky or other alleged human rights violations. One of the clearest disappointments related to foreign policy issues was in late 2003 when Putin's envoy, Dmitri Kozak, made an attempt to resolve the Transnistrian conflict by securing a Moldovan-Transnistrian agreement with the Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin, but the EU intervened and resisted the plan that would have entailed a federal structure for the country. Yet the biggest setback from the Kremlin's perspective was the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in the winter of 2004–2005. The EU's role, in particular, in that context was perceived as negative, because it had intervened in the electoral process and demanded new elections on the basis of election fraud, challenging the Russian blueprint for the future of Ukraine. The relations between the EU and Russia were further burdened by Russia's decision to impose an import ban on Polish meat in November 2005 due to a suspicion that Poland had exported meat to Russia from third countries, where the risk of animal diseases was high. The negative trends culminated in the Russo-Georgian war in 2008.

The Medvedev presidency (2008–2012) – the fifth phase in the evolution of Russian policy towards the EU – was not as strained as the previous period, but to a degree this had less to do with substance and more with the style of Medvedev himself as President. Although the start of Medvedev's presidency witnessed a crisis in Russia's relations with the West due to the war in Georgia, the relationship was normalized very swiftly, and the fact that Russia let the EU play a role as mediator and stabilizer in the conflict was seen as a positive element. Overall, Medvedev's key policy agenda was modernization as a response to Russia's persistent problems of economic backwardness, corruption and paternalistic attitudes, as Medvedev (2009) listed them in his agenda-setting "Go Russia!" article. Although Russia would not follow any foreign model in its reform policies, the EU was "in all respects Russia's most important partner for the purpose of modernisation" (Trenin, 2011: 20). During the Medvedev era, Russia concluded a Partnership for Modernisation in 2010 with the EU as well as a host of bilateral partnerships with EU countries. Trade relations flourished, and cultural and scientific cooperation were expanded, but there were also disappointments. One of the key objectives in Russian policy towards the EU was the abolishment of visas. Although negotiations progressed and technical readiness was improved, the final goal was not reached, and Russia accused the EU of politicizing the issue. Novel steps in cooperation were, however, taken in many issue areas, for example Russia for the first time participated in a EU-led crisis-management operation in Central Africa. Yet, no breakthrough in political relations followed. Most significantly, Medvedev's proposal for a new European Security Treaty did not succeed. Indeed, the reservoir of trust was not strengthened, but skepticism replaced earlier enthusiasm on both sides.

Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 started the sixth and so far the most contested phase in Russia's policy towards the EU, culminating in the rupture of relations in 2014 over the Ukraine conflict. The re-election of Putin as President was seen as disappointing by many EU leaders, and expectations were kept rather low on both sides. Putin's agenda was clearly becoming more assertive both internally as well as externally. This was visible at the otherwise rather amicable Russia-EU Summit in St Petersburg in June 2012 where Putin demanded that the EU should recognize the Eurasian Customs Union, and explained that it was now actually the right counterpart for the formal treaty negotiations between Russia and the EU. Yet, there were also some positive signs in the overall relations. For example, Russia's accession to the WTO in August 2012 was greeted as a progressive step by the West, and particularly before the Sochi Winter Olympic Games in February 2014, there seemed to be a short 'charm offensive' in the relations with the West. However, at about the same time, Putin had also started to propagate Russia's own 'traditional' and conservative values as representing the 'true Europe' and being superior to those prevalent in the liberal and increasingly decadent West (Putin, 2013). Before the Ukraine crisis, problems in Russia-EU

relations were caused by a number of contentious issues ranging from the Russian anti-gay propaganda law and the sentencing of the Punk group Pussy Riot, to the civil war in Syria, to trade and energy issues as well as to the EU bailout of the Cypriot banks. The Ukraine crisis, however, became the most flammable topic on this mounting list of disagreements, partly because it was not a bilateral issue but because the events in Ukraine also had their own dynamics. Russia's annexation of Crimea and the warfare in Eastern Ukraine led the EU nevertheless to impose stepwise sanctions on Russia, with Russia replying by countersanctions applied to European imports. Although dialogue with European leaders continued in various bilateral and multilateral formats, political summit meetings on the EU level came to a halt. After three years of the Euromaidan events in Ukraine, not much has changed in Russia-EU relations, but a new confrontational normalcy has set in.

The basic story of the relations is rather familiar to the expert community, but some phases of this history of Russia-EU relations are more contested among researchers than others as interpretations are loaded with political implications. Overall, the relations have constantly evolved between more optimistic and more strained periods, rather than having been a steady linear story from a cooperative relationship towards conflict. Moreover, Russia has not been a mere object of EU policies. It has sometimes been claimed that the EU has imposed its rules and norms at the formative phase of the partnership when Russia was still a weak actor, but we argue that Russia bargained hard and successfully with the EU over the terms of the partnership. Perhaps unwittingly, the institutional framework received deeper forms of post-sovereign principles and the consequent expectation of political conditionality than Russia probably first realized. Another critical nodal point can be seen when Putin's "European vocation" of the early 2000s turned, first, into stagnation and then confrontation. There was clearly a certain accumulation of felt disappointments and frustration on both sides that contributed to the negative trajectory. However, non-linearity applies to this evolution too, since the Medvedev period was distinctively different from Putin's presidencies before and after him. Although no breakthrough in Russia's relations with the EU was achieved, escalating conflicts were avoided, and in many issue areas also steps towards expanding cooperation were taken. The future of the relations remains uncertain at this time of writing, but since the Ukraine crisis, a new normalcy consisting of political confrontation and sanctions but also of continued dialogue and even cooperation in some areas is taking place.

Making of Russian policy

Russia's 1993 Constitution granted the President of the country vast powers and autonomy in foreign and security policy, but the overall relations between Russia and the EU can be seen as consisting of various levels (Romanova, 2013). Although the making of Russian foreign policy is a collective business involving many actors, the President has been the key individual in Russian foreign policy decision-making and has decided over the nature of the relations with the EU. The most visible exception to this was under President Dmitri Medvedev (2008–2012), when the locus of decision-making and the consequent political power largely moved away from the President towards the government headed by Putin as the prime minister (see Lo, 2009). But even then, Medvedev played an essential role in shaping Russia's policy towards the EU.

The scholarly community seems to be in agreement that it is increasingly President Putin and a narrow circle of his colleagues in the Kremlin that take the key decisions (see Kryshantovskaya and White, 2005; Lo, 2015). Obviously, a strong president-centric image of Russia's policy towards the EU is an oversimplification that does not bear serious scrutiny, but it does point to Putin's extraordinary role as the ultimate leader in Russia. In addition, it also alludes to the need to factor in the biography, psychological dispositions and even personal idiosyncrasies of the President (see Hill and Gaddy, 2015).

Be that as it may, we may nevertheless proceed from a fairly hierarchical understanding of the key players in Russian foreign policy decision-making that stands in stark contrast to the institutional cacophony so evident in the case of the EU. There is also some evidence that suggests the Ukraine conflict has resulted in a further reduction of the inner circle, where Putin and a very small group of trusted confidants make the essential decisions concerning Russian foreign policy at times even outside the formal decision-making structures and mechanisms (see Zygar, 2016). This has the unfortunate side effect of making it harder to gain reliable information about the workings of such closed and often informal groupings and the effect of this dynamism on decision-making in Russia. As to the formal institutions, the Presidential Administration is, in the words of Trenin and Lo (2005: 10), “the true national government”, ultimately responsible for the strategic guidance of Russian policies, both domestic and foreign, and answerable only directly to the President. Another institution worth mentioning is the Security Council. Although originally intended to act as an executive tool in foreign and security matters, the Security Council has practically never played a key role in Russian foreign policy (Mankoff, 2009: 55). During Putin’s tenure, however, the profile of the Security Council has been significantly upgraded.

The Foreign Ministry is in charge of the implementation of presidential foreign policy and plays a key role in the conduct of day-to-day affairs with the EU. The role of the Foreign Ministry is not always seen as progressive, but writing in the mid-2000s, the former External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten (2005: 205), noted how the Ministry was the place where one could see the Soviet Union still in existence. Foreign ministers have, at times, become powerful figures in their own right, also in regard to the policy towards the EU. This was the case especially when Andrei Kozyrev and Yevgeny Primakov were foreign ministers. While Kozyrev was associated with the Western orientation in Russian foreign policy, Primakov’s doctrine was ‘multivectoral’. Sergey Lavrov, who had been serving as foreign minister since 2004, is popular at home and prominent abroad, but it seems that he is not so much driving as loyally executing as far as key decisions of foreign policy are concerned. Yet, especially when it comes to Russia’s relations with the EU, the Foreign Ministry tends to have some important influence since it can offer specialists that have the kind of detailed knowledge about the EU that is often, and rather surprisingly, lacking in the highest echelons of Russian decision-making. The Mission of the Russian Federation to the EU plays a key role here, and its head, Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov, has occupied a very visible position in EU-Russia relations during his ten-year tenure.

Traditionally, prime ministers in Russia have been implementers of presidential directives rather than political leaders of their own. However, during Putin’s tenure as prime minister, the authority and power of this office grew immensely, assuming a leading role in Russian politics, only to lose that position once Putin moved back to the Kremlin. Other sectoral ministers also have relevance for relations with the EU, such as economic development and trade and finance. This is due to the multi-sectoral nature of EU-Russia interaction itself, which has strongly emphasized economic issues and cooperation, giving the specialists in these ministries added significance compared with some other bread and butter issues of foreign and security policies. The Ministry of Economic Development, for example, is a very important actor in EU-Russia relations, with its own mission responsible for trade in Brussels, and often represents a more liberal attitude than the MID.

Although the Federal Assembly and its two chambers, the Council of the Federation and the State Duma, officially enjoy a respected role in constructing foreign policy, the parliament and its deputies have become increasingly marginalized in the actual making or even approving of the policy (Mankoff, 2009: 54). They have, however, an important role as the official talking shop of the country, and the representatives often support and explain Russian positions to the outside world. For example, the chair of the Duma’s foreign affairs committee, Alexei Pushkov, has often publicly brought up Russian concerns in diverse fora related to relations with the EU

or its member states. There are also direct linkages between the parliamentarians conducted in the framework of the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee.

A number of federal subjects – most of them being regions, some of them cities – that constitute the Russian federation have also played a role in Russia's overall relations with the EU. According to the Russian constitution, the federal subjects have some formal powers to influence foreign policy decisions within the federal system as well as to establish and carry out external policies of their own. They can conclude treaties, establish representative offices, make statements, attract foreign investments and tourism, and cooperate in many other ways with international bodies (Busygina, 2007; Sergunin, 2008). The federal subjects that were relevant, especially with regard to relations with the EU, were the regions adjacent to EU member states, in particular, Kaliningrad, Karelia and Pskov, which have participated in the so-called Euroregion schemes, such as Euregion Karelia across the Finnish-Russian border, Euregion Pskov-Livonia including the Lake Peipsi project across the Estonian-Russian border or Euroregion Baltic around Kaliningrad (see Roll et al., 2001; Aalto, 2002; Huisman, 2002; Browning and Joenniemi, 2004). The most active period of the involvement of the federal subjects in the external relations was in the 1990s and the early 2000s, after which such activities were curtailed rather effectively by the Kremlin. The regions nevertheless concluded hundreds of international agreements, and many of them sought tighter contacts with their foreign partners. Although the federal authorities have contested many of these agreements and replaced regional leaders who have been perceived as too independent, some forms of crossborder cooperation have continued. Crimea and Sevastopol are special cases in the list of the federal subjects because they have not been recognized by the EU as being part of Russia.

Traditionally, Russians have held very positive views of the EU (Tumanov et al., 2011: 141). At the same time, it is doubtful whether this positive image has ever really been based on any detailed understanding of what the EU entails, or whether the responses rather reflect the positive connotations connected with Europe in general (Semenenko, 2013). The popular support in Russia for EU membership – even if the question can be regarded as hypothetical – nevertheless declined from 50 per cent to under 30 in the early 2000s. Yet, according to the polls conducted by Pew Research Center (2015), in 2013 nearly two-thirds of Russians still felt favourably disposed towards the EU. The EU's image has been on a consistently higher level than that of the United States, not to mention NATO. Of the member states, Germany in particular deserves to be mentioned as it has traditionally been seen as the key player inside the EU. During the conflict in Ukraine, however, the perception of the EU, along with that of Germany and the United States, took a marked turn for the worse. In 2015 only about one-third of Russians (still) regarded the EU favourably. As a result, the image of the EU is now almost on a par with the traditional adversaries, the United States and NATO, whereas China is regarded as Russia's closest friend (see also VCIOM, 2014 and Levada-Center, 2015). The negative trend has also impacted Germany's image, which was perceived as being under the tutelage of the United States rather than being an autonomous actor (VCIOM, 2015). A poll conducted by Levada in November 2015 revealed that 75 per cent of respondents said that Russia should mend fences with the West. At the same time, 65 per cent of respondents saw that Russia should seek to accomplish this without undue compromises in its policies vis-à-vis the West (Hartog, 2015). The Russian media representations of the EU have also become more negative: the EU is seen as weak but still a competitor, and it is often de-personified as an entity (Chaban et al., 2017).

Russia's policy impact

There has been some discussion over Russia's influence on the EU and the policies of the member states. While Russia has had a degree of success in fostering its objectives with regard to the

individual member states, its access and lobbying capacity at the EU level has been rather limited as exemplified by some key EU decisions in the energy sector. On the other hand, Russia has been rather effective in reasserting its great power status vis-à-vis the EU, and it has been difficult for the EU to influence Russia's position radically in any of the key issues on the agenda, a fact that should be seen in comparison with the sometimes major impact of EU policies in the states of its Eastern neighbourhood.

Since the mid-2000s, but particularly against the backdrop of the 2014 crisis and conflict in Ukraine, the debate over Russia's influence has concerned its 'soft power' in particular (Rutland and Kazantsev, 2016). Divergent views exist in this regard. On the one hand, some argue that Russia's soft power, tantamount to tactics of 'hybrid warfare', poses a danger to the EU and its member states, undermining common policies and creating undemocratic practices, for example through supporting right-wing groups (Schoen, 2016). Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss (2014) see that "the Kremlin exploits systemic weak spots in the Western system, providing a sort of X-ray of the underbelly of liberal democracy". On the other hand, others hold that Russia's attempts to use soft power do not wield much influence. For example, Joseph Nye (2013) is sceptical about Russia's soft power: "although Putin has urged his diplomats to wield soft power, Russia does not have much". The debate has become sensitive since not all those opinions that are favourable to Russia and its behaviour, particularly in the Ukraine crisis, can be seen as evidence of Russian influence. What we know is that influence attempts exist; some support Russian views, but the majority of the EU populace has not been persuaded by the Russian positions and information campaigns. Russia's image has certainly not been enhanced, and very few believe in Russia's narrative of the Ukraine conflict, while the concrete decisions at the EU level have not been to Russia's liking. Although Brexit was mainly greeted in Russia, it cannot be counted as a success of Russian policy towards the EU.

Explaining Russian policy

For researchers interested in Russian foreign policy, the main question is often whether this policy is driven by power or ideology, as classically stated by George Kennan (1947) with regard to the Soviet Union or by such factors as geopolitics, security, economic interest, status or identity. It can be argued that all of these are enduring goals of Russia's foreign policy (Donaldson and Noguee, 2014), but there are also more nuanced discussions on the basis of which both temporal and geographical variation is explained. Russia's policy towards Europe has typically been indicative of its overall essence.

The old debate concerning Russian foreign policy was mostly framed between what – in IR parlance – are known as offensive and defensive realists, namely those who see hegemony and territorial expansion as the ultimate goal of Russia's foreign policy, and those who see Russia's interests more in terms of its defensive security needs. Alongside these two accounts, a growing number of scholars and pundits see Russia's foreign policy more in terms of maximizing economic gains rather than security. Some associate Russia's economic interest with the nation as a whole, some with the growth of the leading sector – gas and energy – while still others think that the economic interest is defined by an even smaller group of people who hold power and want to profit from it. In the words of Dmitri Trenin (2007), Russia's business is business. Sometimes this debate over the fundamental nature of Russian foreign policy can be simplified between two positions, namely between those who emphasize Russian national interest as a rational choice (Schleifer and Treisman, 2011), and those who think that various cultural, sociological and psychological factors play a significant role in Russian foreign policy formulation in a manner that obscures any straightforward notion of rationality (Forsberg and Pursiainen, 2017).

Domestic political explanations also surface quite often when Russian foreign policy is analysed. There are three basic variants. First, is the proposition that the regime type in itself affects Russia's relations with the Western powers (Lynch, 2016). Second, domestic political explanations may refer to the changes in the domestic constellations of power, and the policy shifts deriving from these changes. In the case of Russia, there have been no conspicuous changes of the governing elite, but alleged changes within the elite. The interests of the business elite were geared towards cooperation with Europe (Stowe, 2001). Hence, the relative decline of the liberal elite and the rise of the siloviki in the early 2000s potentially explains the shift in Russia's foreign policy away from the Western and European orientation (Kryshtanovskaya, 2008). Another variant of domestic political explanation would be the diversionary theory of conflict, whereby conflict is an outcome of power holders who have domestic difficulties and who want to increase or restore their popularity by creating an external conflict. This chimes quite well with Russia's behaviour to a degree, as Yeltsin started to adopt a critical stance towards the EU as his popularity waned. The recent phase of the conflict between the EU and Russia can be related to fears that Putin's regime might be challenged at home, but the more conflictual period started well before Putin had any problems with the support of the masses in Russia. Margot Light and David Cadier (2015) have nevertheless concluded that regime consolidation has been the main objective of Russia's contemporary foreign policy behaviour.

The sociological and psychological perspectives often start from the premise that Russian foreign policy is driven by identity concerns, since interests are defined on the basis of a certain identity (Hopf, 2002; Tsygankov, 2016; Neumann, 2017). Identity-based explanations typically emphasize that Europe has been Russia's most significant 'Other' and that Russia is a status-seeker trying to restore and strengthen its position as a great power and acquire recognition for it (Medvedev and Neumann, 2012; Leichtova, 2014; Schiffers, 2015), but they also have entailed Russia's desire to be regarded as a European country endowed with attributes like democracy and a market economy (Splidsboel-Hansen, 2002). Such explanations are sometimes discussed from the perspective of role theory (Grossmann, 2005). Identity-based theories often come close to domestic explanations when shifts in Russian identity are explained through the discursive preponderance of a certain school of thought. The traditional way of distinguishing between two intellectual groupings in Russia's foreign policy thinking, Westernizers and Slavophiles, has offered a powerful way of looking at this debate through lenses of identity (Neumann, 2017). Yet, changes in identity are often connected not simply to the intellectual debate but to the wider spectrum of discursive structural pressures (Clunan, 2009; Makarychev, 2014). Stephen White and Valentina Feklyunina (2014) have identified three basic identity discourses in Russia, arguing that the first discourse regarded Russia as a part of Europe, as defined by the West – a view that was predominant in the early 1990s. But subsequently, the mainstream view was based on the understanding that Russia was an equal and constituent part of the EU-centric Europe, while the third discourse emphasizing Russia's normative superiority vis-à-vis the EU-centric 'Europe' has been in the ascendancy recently. Moreover, negative images of the EU have also emerged and become sticky in the course of interaction of the two parties where various psychological mechanisms such as attribution error – the habit to interpret the behavior of the other on the basis of pre-formed negative conceptions – have led to the increasingly negative image of the EU in Russia (Casier, 2016).

Closely linked to identity and power, status is not always seen as a separate foreign policy motivation, but it is quite intriguing to take this perspective seriously with regard to Russia, given Russia's often expressed desire to be a great power respected as such by others (Clunan, 2009; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014; Tsygankov, 2012). Status theories may explain why Russia has been interested in creating and developing a partnership with the EU, since Russian leaders have seen Russia as a European power and cooperation with other European great powers has been a

traditional reference group and symbolic arena of its diplomatic presence. At the same time, status theories can account for Russia's constant problems in its relations with the EU, since the EU has both questioned the Russian commitment to European values and relegated its position of a great power to that of a junior partner. Although Russia had the privileged status of a strategic partner, it was still a third party rather than equal to the EU when rules and norms were negotiated, and not even on a par with great powers inside the EU when decisions in Brussels were taken. Russia's identity thus changed, and it distanced itself from Europe as defined by the EU.

There is again no hard evidence to hand that would validate one account and disprove the others. They all offer relevant perspectives on Russia-EU relations. One means of combining them has been through neoclassical realism. As Elena Kropatcheva (2012: 38) has argued, in order to understand Russian foreign policy towards the West, "both the domestic context of action – material power capabilities, subjective self-perception and perception of international realities – as well as objective changes in the international context, that is the actions of the West, have to be taken into account". Typically, however, we would expect Russia to seek cooperation with Europe if defensive security, economic gain in the long term, or just European identity were the primary driving forces behind Russia's foreign policy. On the other hand, if Russia's foreign policy is driven by the goal of territorial expansion or the short-term economic interest of a particular ruling elite, we would expect conflict. We would also expect conflict if Russian foreign policy is driven by identity, if identity duly means that there is a growing need to underline that Russia is special in some way, and different from Europe (Neumann, 2017). Status – or honour – would, according to Andrei Tsygankov (2012), lead to cooperative behaviour if granted to Russia, but to conflict if status were denied, particularly when Russia itself is confident of its own status.

Although Russian foreign policy in general would be driven by all of the aforementioned goals, certain emphases in Russia's relations with the EU can be discerned. As the EU is not a fully fledged military actor, it is rather understandable that security concerns have not been primary in Russia's policy towards the EU. Most prominently, security concerns have emerged when Russia has assumed that EU enlargement would also lead to NATO enlargement. Yet security cooperation has been rather limited, even when the threat perception has been mutual. Economic interests have often predominated, but economic motives cannot provide an explanation for every political objective or trade dispute with the EU. Russia's identity position towards the EU has been contested in the Russian domestic debate. Russian leaders have emphasized both Russia's Europeanness and its distinctive features. Status often seems to be at stake. For example, foreign minister Sergey Lavrov (2013) very clearly indicated that the biggest problem in the EU's attitude towards Russia is that it does not treat it as an equal partner. Russia's willingness to establish a Eurasian Union comparable to the EU can also be seen as a sign of status politics.

Overall, Russian policy towards the EU has mainly pursued its economic interests. Russia has favoured partnership and cooperation, refraining from using energy as a weapon against the EU, but it has also safeguarded its sovereignty as well as its own economic benefits in various disputes. After the Ukraine crisis, attempts have been taken towards reducing economic interdependence with the EU and some cultural distancing was already taking place before the crisis. Security questions entered into the relations when the eastern enlargement started to encroach on critical areas, Ukraine in particular, with Russia vehemently protecting its sovereignty in all fields. It is an open question to what extent EU presence in the Eastern European countries was seen as an irreversible step towards full Western integration with NATO (all countries that so far have joined NATO did so before joining the EU), or whether the EU neighbourhood policy rather challenged Russian regional leadership and its ambition to build a Eurasian Union. Status concerns can explain why Russia has been willing to cooperate with the EU, but has been disappointed and has protested when its status as an 'equal partner' or as a great power with its own

sphere of influence has not been respected. Identity concerns and the representation of ‘Europe’ as an Other became gradually more visible after the Russian attempt to become accepted as legitimately and fully ‘European’ failed towards the end of Putin’s first term as President. Yet, there is a lot of uncertainty when it comes to validating explanations for the true motivations behind Russian foreign policy since access to the decision-making process has been so restricted: the competition between two perspectives – domestic political motivation or the elite interests driving Russian foreign policy on the one hand, and national interests defined in terms of humiliating experiences, fears and strategic objectives on the other – are not easy to resolve.

Conclusions

Russian policy towards the EU has evolved in several phases. We have argued that the development has not been linear, but it has waned between more cooperative and confrontational relations. Overall, the relations have depended more on the general perception of the national interests and the role of the EU as a partner rather than on the specific issues. Russia’s key interests were related to economy and identity, but in the 2000s, particularly after the Orange revolution in the Ukraine, they started to include security aspects too. The view of the EU as partner has been devalued, but it only changed clearly for the worse before the Ukrainian crisis and has stayed negative since. Nevertheless, Russia still sees the EU as a potential partner, though the EU is regarded as weak and decaying and harbouring bad intentions against Russia.

Research on Russian policy towards the EU has been fairly rich and comprehensive in the overall context of Russia’s foreign policy, but much of that research has focused on policy issues and has been descriptive and often prescriptive in nature. At present, no single theory or approach dominates the field, but diverse theoretical schools and explanations coexist. Even within such theoretical approaches there is little consensus as to what direction Russian foreign policy is going to take in the longer run. Sadly, in the present situation, scholarly camps tend to be formed more on the basis of their political content than on theoretical grounds, which has confused theory development. Future research, however, should be able to distance itself from the dangers of presentism and political instrumentalism without losing the purpose of offering understanding as well as concrete proposals and guidance on how the relationship between Russia and the EU could be restored and improved.

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