Intra-European Union dynamics
The interplay of divergences and convergences

Sandra Fernandes

Since 1997, the European Union (EU) has engaged in a special relationship with Russia. Their Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) provides for a complex institutionalisation. However, despite cooperative advancements like the Four Common Spaces or Partnership for Modernisation (David and Romanova 2016; Forsberg and Haukkala 2016), political and normative rapprochement has not emerged from institutionalised cooperation (see also DeBardelheben; Morozov this volume), which provoked disillusionment on the part of many EU actors.¹

Given that it is mainly the EU institutions that shape the institutional model of EU-Russia cooperation, this chapter aims at identifying the dynamics of divergence and convergence among EU actors, ultimately leading to the major suspension of dialogue with Moscow after the 2014 events in Ukraine. Individuals, institutions or other entities with the power to shape or make decisions, take actions or delegate those powers to an agent are considered actors in this chapter (see also Romanova this volume). This analysis questions the robustness of the apparent common approach towards Russia as a method to govern relations with Moscow, as materialised in the ‘five guiding principles’² and the renewal of sanctions against Russia (Council of the European Union 2016; European Commission 2018a). Some EU practitioners perceive that the post-Crimea consensus fails to embody a vision towards Russia, while others value this unique moment for the opportunity granted to formulate a new policy or even strategy.³

The analysis builds on the core tensions between national and supranational actors that frame EU governance (Boussaguet 2011; Jones et al. 2012; Nugent 2017). The literature on EU external action and EU-Russia relations has highlighted Russia as one of the most divisive issues for EU actors (Casier and DeBardeleben 2018; Fernandes 2013; Leonard and Popescu 2007; Sakwa 2017). Member states disagree on the means and goals for achieving a rapprochement with Russia. EU institutions differ in their views as well. The Council of the EU is the most obvious venue for member states to advance their preferences. The European Parliament in turn is a place to voice problems in relations with Russia, particularly to stress the growing value gap. The European Commission tends to play the role of honest broker among EU actors.

The unprecedented EU common positioning on the five guiding principles and sanctions might demonstrate a major evolution in the interplay of different interests and preferences in the EU towards more convergence. To unpack these dynamics, this chapter identifies core EU actors and explores cases in key policy areas and in the context of various crises. This research is
based on official EU documents, secondary literature and semi-structured interviews and comprises the period from 1997 onwards, with a greater focus on the post-2004 and 2014 dynamics brought by the integration of new member states into the EU and the Ukrainian crisis, respectively. First, the interplay of divergent goals and interests of the three legislative EU institutions is identified. Second, attempts to ensure greater convergence over time are explored; such convergence has facilitated the advancement of certain internal principles, such as solidarity and, more recently, resilience.

**EU polity: core actors and diverging positions**

As framed by the EU itself, the EU’s broad priorities are set by the European Council, which brings together national and EU-level leaders; directly elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) represent European citizens . . . the interests of the EU as a whole are promoted by the European Commission . . . governments defend their . . . national interests in the Council of the European Union; the European Council sets the EU’s overall political direction – but has no powers to pass laws.

*(European Union 2018)*

The Council, the Commission and the Parliament are the main institutions for law-making. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (European Union 2007) sets out three different types of EU competences (as opposed to national prerogative) as follows: exclusive (for instance, trade), shared (for instance, justice and home affairs) and supporting competences (articles 3, 4 and 6). In external policies such as the Common Trade Policy, the ordinary legislative procedure as a decision-making procedure gives a central role to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. As a legislative initiator, the Commission’s role is pivotal, beyond its competence of negotiating with third parties on behalf of the EU. In the Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP), the Commission and the Parliament have a much more limited role as compared to the European Council and the Council of the EU. The EU is represented by the president of the European Council and the high representative (HR) of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy in the CFSP (Olsen 2021), while member states retain veto power.

In this institutional context, the relations of the EU with third actors entail a multilevel governance that has evolved to give more power to the EU supranational level in comparison to the national level. However, both supranational actors and member states shape the policy depending on formal and informal power in relation to the policy concerned (Bach et al. 2014; Best 2016; Bouchard et al. 2014; Nugent 2017).

A possible critique is that member states have prioritised bilateral relations with Russia in order to serve their national interests, to the detriment of a community approach (see Schmidt-Felzmann this volume). Despite the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the HR under the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the EU’s external action has been repeatedly criticised for a lack of coherence and unity. In addition to the functional dimension of EU decision-making, the literature has also pointed out that the interplay of values and strategic concerns/interests shapes the EU’s external action (Noutcheva et al. 2013), requiring the identification of the core EU actors and the kind of interests they advance.

The PCA articulated strategic and normative intents. The economic dimension of the relationship was given greater attention, especially from 2003 onwards, under the Common
Economic Space (European Commission 2005). One major explanation for this is that the EU is the largest trading partner and the biggest foreign direct investor in Russia, whereas Russia is the EU’s fourth largest partner, with a prevalence of energy exports (European Commission 2018b). In this area, the European Commission and the Council of the EU have been prominent in advancing cooperation, as opposed to the European Parliament that has been vocal in criticising Russian deviation from EU standards, including the need for reciprocity as a sound basis for cooperation. At the economic and trade level, reciprocity refers to Russian measures considered obstacles to trade and liberalisation and hence equal opportunities for EU companies in the Russian market. For instance, European airlines still have to pay for Siberian overflight, although an agreement to eliminate those payments was adopted in 2014. The Common Economic Space operates in a format of sectoral dialogues, which were suspended after the annexation of Crimea (see also Romanova this volume). The Commission’s Directorate-General (DG) for Trade is the institution where officials are most frustrated about the relationship with Russia:4 trade disputes within the WTO reinforce this perception (European Commission 2018b).5

The Council and the Commission compete over external policies despite the existing formal division of competences. The Commission is perceived in this competition as having strengthened its institutional status while negotiating in the format of the sectoral dialogues.6

Due to the division of competences, the Commission is also Russia’s primary interlocutor in the Common Space for Research, Education and Culture and partly in that for Freedom, Security and Justice. The Council takes the lead in the Common Space for External Security and partly in that for Freedom, Security and Justice. The Commission has Russian desks in several of its DGs. The former Unit 10 of the former DG for External Relations (DG RELEX) dealt specifically with Russia, although other DGs played and play a substantial role in the relationship depending on their domain (for example, energy or trade). Today, as we shall see in the following, the EEAS assumes a specific role. In the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, the working party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia (COEST) has a significant role in creating EU consensus before decisions rise to the higher-level agenda. However, COEST has no decision-making power and receives instructions from the capitals.7

The sharing of leadership reflects the foundational tension between supranational and national prerogatives. Agenda-setting inside the Union is strongly shaped by the Commission as an executive body, a legislative initiator and a negotiator with third parties. As a consequence, among EU institutions, the European Commission has had the strongest position in Moscow through its Delegation, created in 1991 as the biggest EU delegation in the world (EU delegation under the EEAS umbrella since 2009). An official working at the Delegation from 2004 to 2007 suggested that the Commission was trying to find a specific role for itself because member states were suspicious of the Commission and endeavoured to keep a distance from it.8 A high-ranking official of the Delegation further acknowledged its pivotal role in informing Brussels and in ‘selling’ the Commission’s decision towards the member states through their various ambassadorial presences in Moscow.9 He emphasised that the Delegation suffers particularly in Moscow due to the EU’s weakness vis-à-vis individual member states’ positions. For instance, no debates about energy were conducted among ambassadors there because they feared to go beyond their own capital’s positions.

The negotiations for a new basic agreement (NBA) to replace the PCA are also an indicator of the EU’s internal divergences on Russia. Despite the fact that the Commission is empowered by a mandate, it cannot negotiate without consulting the Council and obtaining a mandate from the member states. This is particularly difficult in the case of Russia, as illustrated by the 2007–2008 Polish and Lithuanian vetoes. Institutional officials recognise there is a continuous
tension between the Council and the Commission and that the EEAS could have a role in reconciling that tension.

In the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, the EEAS role on Russia is considered central, particularly in drafting the five guiding principles.\textsuperscript{10} In fact, as of the entry of the Lisbon Treaty into force, the newly created EEAS supports the work of the HR (who also serves as vice-president of the European Commission). The EEAS aims at creating more coordination among the Council and the European Commission on external relations and improving cooperation among member states. The EEAS has indeed allowed for greater coherence, but coordination issues, cultural barriers and turf wars still persist (Koenig 2015). However, its dependence on the willingness of member states has also raised issues concerning the EEAS capacity for action. Before its inception, the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit attached to the Secretary General performed that function. Created in 2002, that office worked closely with the staff of the Russian Mission to the EU. Each member state appointed a diplomat to liaise with the HR. The EEAS role is more of a guarantor that the EU message towards Russia is coherent. Since 2014, EU officials from different institutions have met in an ad hoc clearing house in Brussels every two weeks in order to discuss a coherent and common approach to be given to Russian requests that are addressed to them in their daily practice. This initiative is illustrative of the EU institutions’ willingness to coordinate better its responses to Russia.\textsuperscript{11}

Overall, officials from the Commission and the Council perceive that Russia plays on its relations with member states to achieve its goals, as opposed to its relations with the Union.\textsuperscript{12} Nonetheless, this question needs to be evaluated on an individual issue basis; for instance, on visa facilitation, Russia prefers to engage with the EU as a whole. There is a tendency that the more proactive member states are towards Ukraine (its close association with the EU), the more reticent they are to advance cooperation with Russia.\textsuperscript{13} Nonetheless, bilateral relations are possible due to the limits of Community competences, as the NordStream gas pipeline illustrates (Langlet 2014).

Both the Council Secretariat and the Commission have defended an approach that sees Russia as a strategic partner (European Council 1999; European Commission 2004).\textsuperscript{14} This view emphasised concrete results that have been achieved in trade, justice and home affairs, cooperation on Iran and so on. The Commission was aware that Russia was not willing to discuss its policies in the shared neighbourhood, and thus the institution defended a pragmatic approach that consisted of following guiding principles in the relationship and expecting to ‘influence Russia in the right direction’.\textsuperscript{15} Signals of the enduring pragmatic approach of the European Commission were given when, for instance, its DGs resumed trips to Moscow to discuss specific areas, such as standards for medicines in 2018. Without touching upon high politics issues, dialogue happens at the working level.\textsuperscript{16} In the context of sanctions, the continued search for a depoliticised dialogue on trade and investment issues has been perceived negatively by other EU actors.

The EU business sector pushes the Commission to facilitate dialogue. The EU-Russia Industrialist Round Table (IRT), for instance, produces technical papers for the EU institutions (though it hardly meets since the post-2014 deterioration of relations). The IRT also created the EU-Russia Business Cooperation Council in 2005 to work as a key interface between EU and Russian institutions and key business sectors. More significantly, the European business sector is represented by the Association of European Businesses (AEB), founded in 1995. The Association regularly publishes a guide with investment and economic advice, and it collaborates closely with the European Commission. For instance, the AEB Legal Committee has played an influential role in following the Duma’s new protectionist measures. The AEB sees EU sanctions against Russia as counterproductive because they build a negative image of the West, which strengthens Putin’s regime.\textsuperscript{17} The position of the AEB is particularly vocal when
the Association organises its annual visit to EU institutions in Brussels. These meetings have become particularly difficult to organise since the 2014 crisis, depending much on the nationality of the EU staff in question, who tend to be like minded with their member state’s attitude towards Russia. The role of the Head of the EU Delegation in Moscow is seen as pivotal for transmitting the views of businesses to Brussels.

In contrast to the Commission and the Council, the European Parliament defends a values-based (as opposed to pragmatist) approach despite internal divergences among its members. The institution can be seen as a mirror of the internal divisions among member states towards Russia. In particular, the work of the Delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee or the drafting of reports on EU-Russia relations illustrate these divergences and the EP’s normative positioning. For instance, in 2000 and 2009, the EP repeated its critiques (European Parliament 2000, 2009). The role of one of the Polish members of the European Parliament, Onysztkiewicz, was influential in 2009, and his statement is illustrative of the Parliament’s position:

> [t]he European Parliament has backed pragmatic cooperation with Russia, but if we are serious we must also address difficult issues like human rights, energy and security. The Member States must now learn to speak with one voice. We must press for compliance with WTO rules and to the principles of the Energy Charter, as well as to improving access to air space and navigation routes.

(Onysztkiewicz 2009)

The 2009 Report summarises the institution’s position, stating that ‘extensive economic cooperation between Russia and the EU must be based on high standards of democracy and free market principles’ (European Parliament 2009). The European Parliament also indirectly expresses its unease concerning its institutional role in the EU. It reminds the Council and the Commission that a new EU-Russia agreement would require Parliament’s approval, thus reinforcing the idea that the institution is not merely a whistle-blower when it comes to EU-Russia relations.

Thus, the institutions have differentiated roles stemming from EU functioning and the internal division of competences. There are also divergences in whether institutions give preference to a pragmatic/interest-based approach towards Russia or to a value-orientated approach. The next section unpacks how attempts to converge have operated in the post-2004 enlargement and post-Crimea contexts.

**Attempts at convergence among EU actors**

The preference of the European Parliament for a norms-based relationship with Russia became more influential in the context of a bilateral trade dispute between Poland and Russia in 2006–2008. The literature has identified clusters of states regarding their attitudes towards Russia, distinguishing friendly orientated, neutral and negative orientated (David et al. 2011; Leonard and Popescu 2007; Schmidt-Felzmann this volume). Depending on the category, one should expect the promotion of interest-orientated policies with less scrutiny on the issue of Russian political convergence, or, contrarily, one should observe an attempt to bind EU policies to Russian compliance with EU standards. The solidarity argument added a new rationale in the sense that any advancement of both dimensions should consider EU coherence as a whole besides the elevation of normative requirements.

In 2006, member states were to give the European Commission a mandate to negotiate an NBA with Russia to substitute the PCA. The Commission received the mandate only in
May 2008. This delay is related to the 2004 enlargement, with the more demanding attitudes towards Russia brought by those member states that previously belonged to the Soviet bloc. However, the real nature of the change became evident only when Poland, and later Lithuania, used their veto power in the Council of the EU to draw attention to their bilateral problems with Russia (Rettman 2007). For instance, Warsaw and Moscow were in dispute over agricultural imports that started in 2005 when Russian authorities banned the import of meat and vegetables from Poland. Such veterinary and phytosanitary issues are recurrent features of Russia’s bilateral relations with EU members because there is no EU-Russian agreement governing this field, despite a memorandum on harmonised certificates (EEAS 2009). To gain attention and build solidarity, Warsaw vetoed the mandate for the negotiations on the NBA. Warsaw’s claims looked legitimate because Tallinn and Vilnius also experienced a high level of tension with Moscow, which involved oil shortages, problems in cross-border traffic and alleged cyber-attacks following the removal of a Soviet monument by Estonian authorities (see also Chernenko this volume).

As a result, the President of the European Commission endorsed the motto of ‘solidarity’ at the Samara summit in May 2007 to support these countries in their problems with Russia (Barroso 2007). The vetoes were lifted only in 2008 when the Commission finally received the mandate to negotiate an NBA. The European Parliament (2007) clarified the understanding of solidarity as a desirable practice of the EU to act ‘with one voice’ towards Russia. To overcome the EU failure to speak with one voice, the Parliament further recommended that

a functioning mechanism should exist within the Council, under the responsibility of the High Representative, which would enable Member States to consult each other sufficiently in advance on every bilateral issue with Russia which could have repercussions on other Member States and the EU as a whole.

(European Parliament 2009)

Additionally, the Union was supposed to ‘develop informal guidelines as to how the principles of solidarity and mutual accountability could underpin EU–Russia relations, with the aim of developing a more united and consistent policy vis-à-vis Russia’ (ibid).

Before endorsing the solidarity principle, the EU had rejected in a direct manner Russian worldviews that implied spheres of influence or the use of military force to achieve them (Barroso 2014; Mogherini 2018; see also Delcour this volume). Although the 2016 ‘five guiding principles’ further clarified Brussels’s common stance, they still fail to provide a common understanding as EU institutions and staff do not consider the principles useful in a consensual form. Some officials in the core EU institutions consider that they provide for a long-lasting common position, while others think that they are procedural rules that do not specify any vision towards Russia. Under the latter view, the member states’ varying perspectives make it very difficult to have an EU policy despite the agreement on the five principles. In particular, they do not aid in the specification of which Russian invitations for meetings to accept and what agenda to discuss. Nevertheless, despite diverging perceptions on the role of the guidelines, it is recognised that, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, EU member states have managed a united front towards Russia. This new state of play introduces a significant change regarding the recurrent criticism of how the EU has dealt with the Kremlin under the (economic) interests rationale. Contrary to the EU position after the Russian–Georgian war of August 2008, or during the Orange Revolution in 2004, EU institutions have straightforwardly endorsed a ‘no business as usual’ position that is expressed at the higher level by the unwillingness since January 2014 of the member states to gather at the biannual EU–Russia summits.
The annexation of Crimea helped to reinforce the ‘no business as usual’ stance, as the approval and so far consistent renewal of sanctions (subject to a unanimity vote in the Council of the EU) demonstrate. Sanctions against Moscow (see also Timofeev this volume) are exceptional since they run counter to the national interests of the member states, in particular those most affected by the measures or the most indulgent with the Kremlin. EU solidarity is difficult to bring about in the field of external policy where there is little EU competence; yet sanctions can be seen as a vivid expression of convergence and solidarity. The European Union Court of Justice has supported this view in its judgments on sanctions (Kalinichenko 2017).

In the face of Russian behaviour, particularly in Ukraine, EU actors’ positioning has converged around the building of resilience of both the EU and its neighbours. For the EU, resilience is defined as ‘a broad concept encompassing all individuals and the whole of society’, that features ‘democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development, and the capacity to reform’ (European Council 2017). The concept has also been introduced as one of the five guiding principles of relations with Russia, as follows: ‘strengthen EU resilience (for example, energy security, hybrid threats or strategic communication)’ (Council of the European Union 2016).22 Resilience can be interpreted as an additional attempt at convergence in a context of crisis. In 2008, the Commission highlighted its pragmatic position by acknowledging ‘the complex web of overlapping and shared interests in the EU–Russia relationship’ and the need to ‘make a sober assessment of where the EU’s own interests now lie’ (European Commission 2008: 2) – principles defended only in rhetoric. The period for ‘no business as usual’ was short lived after the Georgian-Russian war because the momentum was with a continuous dialogue with Russia, despite the disapproval of Russian military involvement in Georgia (Oomen-Ruijten 2008), nevertheless, it helps us to grasp the nature of the major rhetorical U-turn that brought the Commission and the Council closer to the position of the European Parliament.

Despite the fact that resilience is formulated specifically in the third guiding principle, it appears to be transversal to the EU institutional dynamics towards Russia. An expressive example is the digital and cybernetic domain that the EU relates to hybrid threats and warfare. Fostering ‘digital’ and ‘cyber resilience’ refers to countering Russian propaganda and defending from attacks that are against EU economic interests and democratic values (European Commission 2017). In 2015, the EEAS, upon the instruction of the European Council, set up the East Stratcom Task Force to raise awareness about disinformation and to improve the Union’s own information performance in Eastern Europe (Portman 2017; David this volume). After cyber-attacks against the offices of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague, the Council has publicly come to attribute responsibility to the Russian military intelligence service (GRU) and insisted on the resilience of its own institutions and those of the member states (Council of the European Union 2018).

With resilience as a new driver of the EU’s action, the 2001 declaration that common values and principles are essential for a ‘genuine EU–RU partnership’ (European Council 2001: 13) foretold one of the key issues in EU actors’ positioning towards Russia. The initial belief of the late 1990s that, in the long term, Russia’s normative transformation would result from its continued engagement with the EU is no longer relevant (see also DeBardeleben; Morozov; Pavlova this volume). The political and security dialogue with Russia is today restricted, economic relations are limited and the global relationship remains blocked.23

However, today’s recognition that a resumption of mutually beneficial relations is needed has emerged through the notion of selective engagement and thus created greater convergence among EU actors. Selective engagement refers to the willingness to move ahead of the suspension of dialogue, provided that the EU has its own interests in specific areas where it can reengage with Moscow without downplaying the five guiding principles. Some areas are more
sensitive, but there is room for convergence depending on the interpretation of EU officials and on their national background. This view is confirmed by the European business sector that senses a change in the European Commission disengagement on economic relations with Moscow and some disposition to engage in discussions with the Eurasian Economic Union Commission (see Kofner and Erokhin this volume).24

Conclusion

The analysis of EU actors validates the internal assessment that the Union is ‘not the kind of strong federation that Russia would like to deal with’ (Wiegand 2008). However, even if it takes more time to emerge, a decision is all the stronger because it reflects consensus (Ambassador of Slovenia to the European Union 2008). This chapter has highlighted core divergences and convergences among the EU institutions and how they have evolved. It underlined the influence of different institutional levels and how EU actors’ positioning had evolved even before the confirmation of that evolution that was brought by the suspension of dialogue, sanctions and the 2016 guiding principles for relations with Moscow.

The advancement of strategic interests had been prioritised by the Council and the Commission until they were seriously questioned by the search for political consonance after the 2004 enlargement, under the promotion of internal solidarity. The position of the European Parliament has shown an enduring preference for intra-EU political convergence and normative reciprocity with Russia. Divergences among EU players’ priorities have ultimately exposed the lack of a system of EU governance whereby institutions (and member states) can produce a consistently coherent approach.

Besides achieving more coherence, the EU institutions still have to find a common strategy towards Russia. The building of resilience and the search for selective engagement are not equivalent to long-term strategic convergence among EU actors but do allow them to portray a common position and find ‘islands of cooperation’,25 even while the resumption of full-scale dialogue under the framework of the ‘common spaces’ is not yet envisioned. Potential islands include, for instance, domains such as health and the environment. The new mandate of EU institutions for the period 2019–2024 faces the limitations of this state of play, and it is not foreseeable that the pragmatists will regain their dominance over the value-orientated actors. However, global pressure on the liberal order and competitive orders in the Eurasian space have potential to challenge further the EU’s coherence to its detriment, assuming that EU institutions do not bridge their internal gaps. From the Commission’s perspective, there is a belief that societal change in Russia would ultimately trigger approximation and, thus, its initiatives focus on people-to-people contacts. Although it is not foreseeable that Brussels will give Russia a visa-free regime on a unilateral basis, there is a shared understanding that this regime would represent a major tool to move ahead of the status quo and towards the further development of people-to-people dialogue.

Notes

2 The five principles include full implementation of the Minsk agreements, closer ties with Russia’s former Soviet neighbours, strengthening EU resilience to Russian threats, selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism and support for people-to-people contacts.
3 Interviews conducted at the EU External Action Service, November 2017, and in Moscow, May 2018.
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4 Interviews in Moscow with European representatives, May 2018.
5 The most controversial issues are tariffs, timber exports, double tariffs and taxes on rail and air transport. Sanitary and phytosanitary measures have also contributed to curbing European exports. Since 2007, progress reports have been published and are available on the website of the EU External Action Service. Information on the results of the cooperation is also provided in the summits’ press releases and on the official websites of the EU institutions. See also Connolly and Deak in this volume.
6 Interview conducted in Brussels, July 2007.
7 The Gymnich meetings are also relevant in defining EU internal positions. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs gather informally for two days once per semester in the country holding the EU Presidency.
8 Interview conducted in Moscow, September 2007.
9 Interview conducted in Moscow, October 2007.
10 Interviews conducted at the EEAS, March 2016 and November 2017.
11 Interview conducted at the EEAS, in Brussels, November 2017.
12 This information is retrieved from the author’s interviews with officials in Brussels, Moscow and member states’ embassies, from 2007 to 2019.
13 Interview at the Secretary General of the Council of the European Union, 29 June 2007.
16 Interview conducted at the EEAS, in Brussels, in November 2017.
17 Interview conducted with a business consultant in Moscow, May 2018.
18 Interview with an anonymous source at the AEB in Moscow, May 2018.
20 Interview at the Secretariat of the European Parliament, Brussels, September 2010. Although belonging to a political group influences attitudes towards Russia, national considerations are also channeled into the Parliament. Globally, government lines, constituencies, European inclinations and political groups are the elements that draw dividing lines among the members of the chamber (Fernandes 2013).
22 The concept is also applied to the countries of the EaP ‘to ensure that both the Union and its neighbouring partner countries remain free to make their own political, diplomatic and economic choices, by reducing the scope for external leverage or coercion’ (Council of the European Union 2016).
23 Information gathered from interviews of the author with EU officials in Brussels and Moscow, November 2017 and May 2018 and from the former EU Ambassador to Russia in Riga, March 2018.
24 Interview conducted at the Association of European Businesses in Moscow, May 2018.
25 The expression is retrieved from the author’s interview with EU officials and representatives of member states, November 2017 in Brussels and May 2018 in Moscow. It is also articulated in an experts’ report (Fischer and Timofeev 2018).

References

Sandra Fernandes


