



## **Russia's Strategic Partnership with Europe**

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## Russia's Strategic Partnership with Europe

Shortly before the twelfth Russian–European Union summit in early November 2003, in an interview with the Italian press, Russian president Vladimir Putin stated, “For us, Europe is a major trade and economic partner and our natural, most important partner, including in the political sphere. Russia is not located on the American continent, after all, but in Europe.” Russia, he continued, is “interested in developing relations with our partners in the U.S. and the American continent as a whole and in Asia, but, of course, above all with Europe.”<sup>1</sup>

Putin has devoted significant time and energy to developing relations with the EU since his appointment as prime minister in 1999 and was involved in writing and presenting Russia's official strategy to the EU in October of the same year. Since 2000, driven by the new president, the Russian government has sought to add substance to the strategic partnership that was declared between Moscow and Brussels. Putin's objectives with the EU are based on his recognition of the need to foster closer and better ties with an enlarging economic and political union of states on Russia's borders, which takes the lion's share of Russian trade and is emerging as a new security actor across the European continent and in world affairs. The EU has become one of the central planks in Russia's foreign policy of international engagement, put in place by Putin following the confusion and isolation of the last years of the Yeltsin era. Although Putin never tires of linking Russian identity, culture, and history to Europe, the stakes are more than psychological—the EU is Russia's most important economic partner.

Nonetheless, contrary to other former Soviet republics such as Moldova and Ukraine, Russia does not seek membership in the EU. Under Putin's

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stewardship, Russian engagement with the EU is marked by a refusal to allow the EU influence in Russia's domestic development, including its economic policies, or internal affairs, such as the Chechen conflict.

These two impulses in Russian policy—forging deeper ties while retaining complete sovereignty—have complicated Russia's interaction with the EU. Essentially, Moscow seeks to have its cake and eat it too. Four years of greater attention by the Russian president have failed to craft the oft-declared strategic partnership, yet problems stem not only from Moscow. Since 1999, despite an impressive array of declarations and speeches about the importance of relations with Russia, the EU has devoted little time to this policy area. Instead, enlargement to 25 member states and the drafting of a constitution have preoccupied the Europeans. Thus, on the eve of the March 2004 Russian presidential election and the EU's dramatic movement eastward, Russian-EU relations remain troubled.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the EU-Russian security dialogue. In 2003 the EU deployed its first security operations in Europe and in Africa. Far from a positive sign for a Russian government seeking to develop a multipolar world not dominated by the United States or NATO, the birth of the EU as a security actor is worrisome to Moscow. EU-Russian security ties are less developed than those Moscow entertains with NATO and, because of the EU's enlargement and growing security ambitions, Russia is concerned that the EU's European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) may challenge Russian interests.

In EU-Russian relations, accommodation must be found based not on rhetorical declarations of partnership but on practical cooperation, whereby the EU and Russia seek to develop concrete foundations for their security dialogue. A promising starting point would be a joint peacekeeping operation to support the settlement of the conflict in Moldova, which confronts the central authorities in Chisinau and the separatist leaders of the Transdniestrian region. Situated in the borderland between an enlarging EU and the Russian Federation, Moldova weaves together the interests and influence of the EU and Russia. Accommodating each other's interests and working together in Moldova can help start to develop a genuine strategic partnership between Moscow and Brussels.

## **The Inextricable Relationship**

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The EU matters for Russia for a host of reasons, the first of which is geographic. With the EU's enlargement in May 2004, Russia will border on five EU member states, four of which are new members (with two—Estonia and Latvia—containing large Russian minorities), and thereby will share a fron-

tier some 2,200 kilometers long with EU countries. The enlarged EU will also surround Russia's Kaliningrad region, an exclave of some 900,000 people. The EU and Russia are thus about to become closer neighbors than ever before.

With the EU as its most important trading partner, accounting for 37 percent of Russia's external trade, Russia also has substantial economic interests in the EU, especially as this share will likely increase to 52 percent after enlargement, according to Putin.<sup>2</sup> Trade in energy resources is vital to both parties: in 1999, 21 percent of the EU's oil came from Russia (representing 16 percent of consumption by EU member states) and 41 percent of the EU's gas was supplied by Russia (representing 19 percent of consumption). The European market is equally significant for Russia: in 1999, 53 percent of Russia's oil exports went to the EU; in 2000, 63 percent of Russia's natural gas exports were supplied to European markets. In terms of overall trade, according to EU calculations, member countries accounted for nearly 25 percent (close to 20 billion euros) of Russia's imports and some 35 percent (45 billion euros) of Russia's exports.<sup>3</sup> The scale of trade imparts strategic importance to the EU as Russia's key economic interlocutor, but the relationship is unbalanced. Russia's share of EU external trade in 2000 consisted of 4.4 percent of imports and a mere 2.1 percent of exports.<sup>4</sup>

**Putin aspires to help shape globalization and not have Russia shaped by it.**

The third reason lies in the realm of ideas. EU officials never tire of predicting that the EU's enlargement will benefit Russia. In the words of EU commissioner Günter Verheugen, "We are firmly committed not to allow new dividing lines to be drawn in Europe."<sup>5</sup> The reality—one that Moscow recognizes—is that enlargement will create insiders and outsiders. If the EU were only a single market and free-trade area, problems between Brussels and Moscow would be limited to the technical arena. The EU is far more, however: it is both a vision for Europe and the reality of uniquely integrated states. Putin aspires to create a strong Russian state that helps shape globalization and is not shaped by it. Developing close ties with European states and the EU as trendsetters of globalization is deemed vital for achieving this objective. In May 2002, Russia's foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, stated, "[I]t is crucial that Russia is not somewhere on the sidelines of this process."<sup>6</sup> The problem is that EU enlargement raises the specter of Russia on the periphery of an ever more powerful Europe.

Finally, the EU is important to Russia for reasons of European security. Moscow is aware that the EU is in the throes of a revolution—in fact, two

## Moscow views EU integration as a model for the CIS.

revolutions. The first consists of the greatest enlargement the EU has ever experienced, with 10 new members joining in May 2004. The impact of enlargement on the EU's internal dynamics will be fundamental: political workings will change, and new constellations of actors will arise. In the run-up to its accession, for example, Poland pushed for greater EU engagement in Ukraine and Moldova; and Lithuania and Latvia have been active in developing military ties with the Caucasus states. From Moscow's perspective,

the new member states may shatter the cozy relations Russia has entertained with some of the older EU members, such as France and Italy. The new members are likely to alter the tone if not the substance of EU policy toward Russia, and their arrival augurs deeper EU engagement in the former Soviet Union. Certainly, the new states will bring a different urgency to relations with Russia that could

lead to greater EU interference in Russia's domestic affairs, such as the Yukos affair and the conflict in Chechnya.

The second revolution is less radical but not less important from the Russian perspective. This concerns operational and conceptual advances in ESDP. Despite all the recent clarion calls of the death of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) because of divisions over Iraq, the EU has emerged as a united security actor. In 2003 the EU launched three missions, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The operations have included tasks ranging from law enforcement and cease-fire monitoring to security and humanitarian crisis management, involving more than 2,000 police and military personnel.<sup>7</sup> These ESDP operations, in particular, are the first test cases of the EU's ability to apply some of the military policy instruments envisaged by the 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal, to have the EU develop by 2003 a rapid reaction force of 60,000 troops that could be deployed within 60 days and would be sustainable for a year. The EU has not yet reached this objective in practice, but the first ESDP operations mark important steps forward.

Moreover, Europe's division over how to handle the Iraq crisis stimulated EU thinking about the development of an EU Security Strategy, a notion which would have been anathema for many EU member states only a year earlier. The EU high representative for CFSP, Javier Solana, was tasked with taking this idea forward. A draft strategy was presented in June 2003 and a final version approved in December.<sup>8</sup> For all its difficulties—and the list is long—CFSP is not dead. Far from it, in fact, and Moscow is keenly aware of the emergence of a new key actor in world affairs, one that is willing to act

on behalf of its interests and is increasingly able to do so. Moscow can hardly ignore the existence of a large, integrated union of states on its border and one from which it is excluded. EU enlargement has a double effect: Russia will move closer to the EU in physical terms and yet remain far from inclusion into Europe's most exclusive club.

## **What Does Russia Want from the EU?**

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Before discussing the recent trends in Russian thinking about the EU, it is worth understanding where Russia started in 1999. The main lines of Russian policy toward the EU were promulgated in a document entitled "The Medium-Term Strategy for the Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the EU (2000-2010)," written in 1999 and presented to Brussels in October of that year by then-Prime Minister Putin.<sup>9</sup>

The strategy reifies Russia's autonomy as a great power, distinct from the EU: "As a world power situated on two continents, Russia should retain its freedom to determine and implement its domestic and foreign policies, its status and advantages of a Euro-Asian state and the largest country of the [Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)], [and the] independence of its position and [its] activities at international organizations." In subsequent statements, Putin has made the limits of Russia's horizon clear: "We do not at present set [ourselves] the task of becoming a member of the EU ... but we must seek to dramatically improve the effectiveness of cooperation and its quality."<sup>10</sup> The strategy establishes the yardstick for relations with the EU as "ensuring national interests" and asserts Russia's right to protect sectors of its economy, even if doing so contradicts the terms of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (the treaty regulating EU-Russian relations that came into force in 1997)<sup>11</sup> or hinders negotiations on accession to the World Trade Organization. In sum, the strategy enshrines Russia's refusal to allow Brussels to interfere in its sovereign affairs.

The Medium-Term Strategy also presents a picture of the EU in heavily instrumental terms. It conveys Russia's view of the EU as a part of its pursuit of a multipolar world and a pan-European collective security system, reflecting elements of former Russian prime minister Yevgeny Primakov's earlier vision of pan-European security, which sought to offset NATO dominance with an increased role for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Medium-Term Strategy declares cooperation between Russia and the EU in European crisis management as seen to "counterbalance, inter alia, the NATO-centrism in Europe." Cooperation with the EU on security issues is perceived as more important for its impact on the wider shape of European security than for its intrinsic value.

The 1999 strategy also illustrates instrumental resonance for the former Soviet Union by presenting EU integration as a model for the CIS. The document bluntly states that “the development of partnership with the EU should contribute to consolidating Russia’s role as a leading power in shaping up [sic] a new system of interstate political and economic relations in the CIS area.” Although the precise implications of this line are left unexplained, it indicates that Russia intends to be Europe’s gateway to the former Soviet Union.

Russia’s insistence on not joining the EU remains the centerpiece of its policy toward Europe today. Moscow continues to refuse to allow Brussels to

have influence over the direction of Russia’s reform policies and internal affairs, including developments in Chechnya. Relations with the EU are firmly ensconced in the realm of foreign policy, not domestic policy. For a state that seeks to join the EU, accession is a revolutionary process that touches all facets of that state’s internal and external affairs and transforms a country on the lines of the EU *acquis*, or model. Putin is not ready to undertake any

such revolution; his vision of a revitalized Russia is one that draws inspiration from the EU model but does not adopt it wholesale.

With enlargement on the brink in 2004, however, the cold sobriety of the 1999 document is sliding toward frustrated anxiety. Russia’s increasing economic and trade dependence on the EU has increased Russian insistence on greater transparency in EU decisionmaking on questions that affect Russia’s interests, such as trade policy, antidumping regulations, and the precise impact of enlargement on Russian goods that are exported to the new member states. Moreover, during the last few years, Moscow has become aware that bilateral ties with key EU member states are no longer enough to deal with an increasingly integrated union of states. Relations with Germany and France, or with Italy and the United Kingdom, remain vital in the Russian-EU couple but no longer sufficient. The 2002 negotiations with Brussels on transit to and from the Kaliningrad oblast confirmed the lesson as Putin’s efforts to achieve a compromise through his relations with France and Italy provided little help. In the end, compromise with Brussels was reached, largely on EU terms.<sup>12</sup>

The new byword of Russian policy is in fact an old one: whereas Moscow once called for a Europe without dividing lines, in reference to NATO, the target is now the EU. Russia seeks a European continent without a sharp division between EU and non-EU states. The words of the head of the Russian

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**Russia intends to be Europe’s gateway to the former Soviet Union.**

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Ministry's All-European Cooperation Department, Vladimir Chizhov, reflect a more widely shared sentiment: "The future of Europe and its role in world affairs largely depend on how successfully we will move forward the accomplishment of our common strategic objective to build a united Europe without dividing lines."<sup>13</sup> More than NATO, the EU has now become an obstacle to Russia's pursuit of a European system in which Moscow enjoys an equal and independent voice.

In line with the 1999 strategy's premise of engaging the EU without joining it, Russia now seeks to achieve a united Europe by creating four common spaces with the EU, to which Brussels officially agreed at the May 2003 EU-Russian summit in St. Petersburg:

- *A common European economic space.* Efforts in this area would concentrate on developing a more open and integrated market between Russia and the EU.<sup>14</sup> Through these discussions, Russia seeks, on the one hand, to offset the potential costs of enlargement on Russian trade and to create mechanisms for managing Russia's reliance on the EU and, on the other hand, to open opportunities for greater European investment in the Russian economy. The Rome summit in November 2003 saw agreement on a concept paper dealing with the creation of this space.<sup>15</sup> The concept paper does little more than set forth the objectives of the dialogue and its scope with few details. All the work remains ahead.
- *A common space of freedom, security, and justice.* In non-EU parlance, this effort means opening discussions on the long-term prospects for visa-free travel. With the EU's enlargement, Russian citizens will lose the right to visa-free travel in the countries of central and eastern Europe because new member states are required to assume the obligations established by the so-called Schengen regime, currently regulating the control of external borders and the issuance of visas within the EU. Moscow refers to the Schengen wall as a new Berlin Wall that will split the European continent between insiders in an integrating union that takes up most of the continent and outsiders relegated to Europe's sidelines. Putin has gone to great pains to put the question of visa-free travel on the agenda with the EU and has met with some success. Yet, resolution is a long way off, as the EU is unsatisfied with the state of border control and migration management in Russia and the CIS, and Russia has still not signed a Readmissions Agreement with the Union.
- *A common space for research and education.* To this end, the EU and Russia have signed a number of agreements allowing Russia access to EU educational exchange programs. This common space is seen as a sign in Russia



of the EU's recognition of the shared cultural and historical heritage of Russia and Europe.

- *A common space on external security.* The EU and Russia have agreed to work toward cooperation in international relations and crisis management, including the maintenance of peace and stability in the Balkans and cooperation in the Quartet to advance settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Four years after the 1999 strategy, the Russian government has gained the EU's willingness to develop this series of common spaces that, in Russia's conception at least, will help to bridge the gap between EU and non-EU Europe. Yet, all of the work remains ahead in terms of giving these concepts substance. Moscow's insistence on retaining full sovereignty over its internal affairs has changed little and remains an impediment to greater engagement with the EU, which, by definition, is an intrusive partner. EU enlargement adds urgency and more troubles to the relationship by increasing Russia's economic dependence on the Union, bringing the EU closer physically to Russia, and increasing the danger of a Russia isolated from a Europe more and more defined by the EU.

### **Russian Views on ESDP**

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A concrete example of shifting Russian attitudes toward the EU has been Russian thinking about the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which has evolved in three periods under Putin's leadership. The first period saw attempts to push cooperation as far and as quickly as possible. From October 1999 through May 2001, Moscow acted in the shadow of the Kosovo crisis—after NATO used force without a United Nations mandate, circumventing Russia in the process—desperate to dilute NATO's predominance and to restore Russia's status on the continent. The October 2000 summit marked a high point of Russian enthusiasm for the EU in its vision of a Europe without dividing lines, where Russia would have an equal voice without formal membership. Russia's ambassador to Brussels compared the summit to a "Sputnik—a rocket to launch relations into a new orbit."<sup>16</sup> In its wake, the Russian Defense Ministry put forward proposals to the EU for joint conceptual work, joint peace operations, and military-industrial cooperation.

The May 2001 Russian-EU summit marked a blow to burgeoning ties, however, and the beginning of the second phase of Russia's attitude toward the EU. The EU had grown wary of greater contact with Russia while vital questions such as the EU's access to NATO assets—mainly planning but

also a limited number of physical assets—remained unresolved. Brussels was also concerned with the potential ramifications of having close ties with Moscow while forming ESDP, for simple reasons of political balance with the United States, NATO, and other vital as well as interested third parties. The Russians were increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of cooperation on the part of the Europeans.<sup>17</sup> The October 2001 summit produced a decidedly low-key joint statement that slowed down the Russian-EU dialogue “in light of progress made by the EU.”

Since October 2001, Russia's third phase has become more skeptical of ESDP and, at the same time, more concerned that it is being excluded from what appears to be emerging as the preeminent security system on the continent. Nonetheless, Russian policy is no less proactive about pursuing cooperation with ESDP than it was in 2000, but Moscow's expectations have changed

**Russia seeks to engage the EU without joining it.**

as Europe's security landscape, especially the role of NATO, has shifted in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The 2002 Prague summit augured the emergence of a NATO with a global security role, a transformation confirmed by NATO's operation in Afghanistan. September 11, 2001, also accelerated the trend of U.S. withdrawal from peacekeeping activities in Europe, including the advent of a Balkans without a U.S. presence and talk of transferring NATO's peace and security responsibilities in the region to the EU. As such, the EU is poised to assume greater responsibility for European security. Paradoxically, given Russia's past ambition to decrease NATO dominance in European security, NATO's lower profile in Europe is a source of some concern for Moscow, as it comes when Russia has finally secured deep ties with the alliance through the NATO-Russia Council. To its dismay, Moscow once again faces the task of seeking a voice in European security with an organization of which it is not a member—different club, same frustration.

Three core perceptions of ESDP have stayed more or less constant throughout this evolution. First and most fundamentally, Russia still views ESDP as a project with an uncertain future. Launched in 1999, the EU's defense policy is nascent, and Moscow is prepared to wait and see the nature of the creature that will come to life before fully declaring its hand. This understanding has imparted caution in Russia's dealings toward the ESDP. At the same time, the fact that ESDP is emerging concurrently with the deepening and widening of the EU leads Moscow to take ESDP seriously, as it only reaffirms Moscow's recognition that the EU is pregnant with power.

At the same time, a second core Russian perception of ESDP is the need to get involved early and substantially. If Russia is likely to remain a weak

state while the EU becomes stronger, then Russia must secure a footing to shape ESDP and ensure that it is not a threat to Russia.

The third core perception concerns Russia's desire to shape a system of European security that ensures that Russia's voice is fully and equally heard. In 1999, following the Kosovo debacle where Russia had failed to halt the NATO operation and saw its favorite security organization, the OSCE, become irrelevant, Putin seized on ESDP to fill the vacuum left for Russia in European security. Moscow looked all the more positively on the EU as it was not NATO, did not have the United States as a member, and thus had the potential to offset NATO dominance in European security. This was particularly true, in Putin's view at the time, because the EU needed Russia to become a great power. In a September 2001 speech before the German Bundestag, Putin asserted, "Europe will better consolidate its reputation as a powerful and really independent center of international politics if it combines its own possibilities with Russia's human, territorial, and natural resources, with Russia's economic, cultural, and defense potential."<sup>18</sup> Russia's insistence on equality in relations with the EU therefore flows from the view that Russia is not just another neighbor of the EU but a vital partner as well.

This last core perception has changed the most following the September 11 attacks and the shifts that have occurred in European and global affairs. The 1999 Medium-Term Strategy had presented the EU as contributing to a multipolar world and offsetting the rise of a world dominated by a single power. A wider and deeper EU, entertaining strong ties with Russia, was said to provide for the "inter-related and balanced strengthening of the position of Russia and the EU in the international community of the twenty-first century." These points still hold in Russian policy. The strategy, however, also presented the development of ESDP and the dialogue with Russia as a means to counterbalance NATO-centrism in Europe. At the very least, ESDP was then seen to dilute NATO's predominant role, providing an alternative locus for decisionmaking, with different membership and rules of behavior. On this score, a reversal has occurred. Since 2001, Russian-NATO cooperation has advanced dramatically while security cooperation with the EU has stagnated.

## **Security Dialogue**

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None of this is to say that the security dialogue is an empty exercise. Before discussing the problems affecting EU-Russian security, the scope of the dialogue should be clarified. The dialogue between Russia and the EU is more frequent than it is between Russia and any other party. In addition to semi-annual summits, the EU and Russia entertain consultations between the

EU's Political and Security Committee (COPS, the main EU body concerned with security decisionmaking) and the Russian ambassador in Brussels, including a monthly meeting with COPS officials. Meetings between the EU Military Committee chairman and Russian Defense Ministry officers first occurred in May 2002. Later that year, Russia assigned an officer as liaison to the EU Military Staff in Brussels.

The security dialogue as a whole generally addresses five major topics. First, Russia and the EU have sought to coordinate positions on wider foreign policy issues, most notably on the Balkans and the Middle East. They have issued numerous joint statements on various questions arising in the Balkans, for example. In the Balkans, however, the EU has taken the lead with Russia's tacit consent,

while cooperation in the Middle East has been relatively greater and more equal, even if both stand in the shade of the United States. Dialogue on the former Soviet Union has been limited; the EU has sought to use the political dialogue to influence Russian policy toward the conflicts in Moldova and the South Caucasus and to address the question of Belarus but all to little avail. Despite similar views on a number of international security questions—ranging from the role of the UN to that of the Quartet in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—the dialogue thus far has produced few, if any, meaningful joint positions.

Second, Brussels and Moscow have exchanged views on concepts of conflict prevention and crisis management. In 2001 the Russian Defense Ministry developed proposals for joint activities involving military crisis management with the EU, and in 2002, Russia's Ministry for Emergency Situations presented to Brussels a concept for civilian crisis management. Direct contacts have been established with both ministries in Moscow. Yet the fact that the EU has not yet developed its own concepts has prevented cooperation from advancing in this area. Moreover, the EU has worked out modalities for the participation of Russian forces in EU crisis management operations<sup>19</sup> that call for the EU to start an intensified dialogue in case of an emerging crisis to inform Russia if an operation is under consideration.

After the formulation of a concept of operations, Russia may be invited to participate and attend a force generation conference that would bring together potential contributors to an operation. If Russia provides "significant forces," Moscow will have the same rights as participating EU member states in the so-called Committee of Contributors, the main body for operational management of the ESDP operation in question. Brussels has formulated

**NATO's lower profile in Europe is a source of some concern for Moscow.**

similar arrangements for civilian crisis management operations, such as police missions. The possibility of Russian involvement crystallized in 2002 during planning for the EU Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia sent five officers to participate in the operation, which was launched in January 2003. Russia's involvement in the EU's first crisis management operation, even if civilian and limited, is significant at the very least in that

the EUPM signals Russia's willingness to work under EU command in the Balkans.

The September 11 attacks brought the third topic—counterterrorism—to the table. In October 2001, the EU and Russia agreed to exchange information on terrorist activities and networks; not to allow such groups on their territories; to block terrorist groups' financial sources; and to exchange intelligence on dubious transactions.<sup>20</sup> In late 2002, Russia and the EU pledged to cooperate in bringing to justice

the "perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of terrorist acts."<sup>21</sup> Cooperation between the EU and Russia in the struggle against organized crime, including money laundering as well as arms and drug smuggling, is an indirect facet of their cooperation in counterterrorist activities and was made official by a joint action plan in 2000 to combat organized crime in the Russian Federation.<sup>22</sup> Although cooperative efforts started slow, meetings of the Russian and EU justice and home affairs ministers have now become routine.

Fourth, Putin's government is keen to develop military-technical cooperation in areas of perceived Russian comparative advantage. Europe's lack of strategic airlift capabilities has long been noted, and Russia has eagerly offered its capabilities to fill the gap. European states have decided to develop a specifically European capability, however, with the A-400M aircraft planned to come into use by 2007. Moscow proposes that the EU also draw on Russia's satellite imaging capabilities to bolster ESDP. The EU Satellite Centre has purchased Russian satellite images in the past, but no special relationship has been established. In all, the EU appears to have no pressing need for access to Russian capabilities, much to Moscow's disappointment.

Finally, Russia and the EU cooperate in the spheres of nuclear safety and disarmament. Both parties maintain similar stances on the need to reinforce multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements, such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime. More specifically, in December 1999, the EU approved a joint action establishing a Cooperation Program for Non-Proliferation and Disarmament in the Russian Federation. The program supports the development of a nuclear safety culture and the creation of

**Russia views itself not just as another neighbor of the EU, but a vital partner as well.**

appropriate monitoring agencies in Russia. Since the June 2002 G-8 summit in Kananaskis, EU programs have become part of a wider effort to support the dismantling and securing of Russia's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, agents, materials, and infrastructure. The G-8-led global partnership consists of a pledge of \$20 billion over the next 10 years, to which the EU has promised 1 billion euros.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Security Dialogue Practice: A Dialogue de Sourds?**

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The EU-Russian security dialogue has cleared a certain amount of ground and laid out directions to pursue in the future. As a whole, however, the dialogue remains nascent and largely declaratory. Serious obstacles impede its more meaningful progress. Most fundamentally, the two sides have clashing visions of the ESDP's objectives and scope. For Moscow, ESDP should advance Russian interests in Europe, thus providing a model of European security that ensures Moscow an equal voice on all security questions and more broadly serves as an instrument to create a greater Europe. The EU sees ESDP in a far different light: not as a motor to drive the creation of a common European security space but rather as a limited instrument of EU foreign policy. Future EU operations have a similarly limited scope and objectives. Their aim is not to accommodate the interests of all parts of Europe but solely to manage crises that arise.

As a result of their different views, the modalities for Russian involvement in ESDP operations fall short of Russian demands. Optimally, Moscow seeks equality with EU member states at every level of decisionmaking, that is, a joint Russian-EU assessment of a situation and agreement on whether it constitutes a crisis (Russia did not see Kosovo in the same way as NATO did, for example), followed by joint planning as well as command and control. For the EU, on the other hand, non-EU states may participate in an ESDP operation if they desire to do so and their participation is considered necessary by the EU, yet external involvement allows for only that—involvement, nothing more, and certainly not full participation in decisionmaking. Even if a non-EU party does provide significant forces to an ESDP operation, that state is still not invited to help draft the concept of operations.

In sum, the conditions for Russian involvement in EU operations are less accommodating than those for NATO operations. Linked to this feature is the EU's vague stance on whether it will seek a UN mandate for all its operations. The EU's desire potentially not to seek UN sanction worries Russia, which wants to avoid a repetition of the Kosovo precedent of a regional organization using force that has not been mandated by the UN. Putin's government is also concerned by the growing geographical scope of EU opera-

tions, specifically that the EU is considering deploying operations spanning a radius of 4,000 kilometers from Brussels, potentially reaching Russian borders with states from the former Soviet Union, in the Caucasus in particular. Russia's concern here is that ESDP will follow the path of the OSCE, narrowing its focus on Russia. Russia seeks to be a subject of ESDP, not its object.

Moreover, in security terms, neither Russia nor the EU has yet to feel an immediate and pressing need for the other. Both are still caught up with

**At the most basic level, Russia and the EU are different kinds of actors.**

their own transformation projects: the EU toward deepening and widening and Russia toward state consolidation. In Russian analyst Dmitrii Danilov's view, neither party sees the other as either the solution to its security needs or the main threat.<sup>24</sup> Disparate priorities dilute the urgency to develop deeper ties.

Factors specific to Russia and the EU have also hampered the security dialogue. Russian policy is heavily presidential. The vast bu-

reaucracies of the Foreign Ministry and the power ministries standing behind Putin are conservative and often obstructionist. Meanwhile, in Brussels, the dispersal of decisionmaking power among different institutions affects the EU's ability to interact strategically with Moscow, projecting the internal makeup of the EU onto the relationship with Russia. The semiannual summits are indeed more a function of the rotating EU presidency than the needs of the partnership.

At the most basic level, Russia and the EU are different kinds of actors.<sup>25</sup>

Russia is a sovereign state, with a consolidating political, economic, and military system; an elected leadership dedicated to advancing the state's interests; and institutions that coordinate means to reach desired ends. The EU is nothing of the sort. It has divided institutions, unclear sovereignty, a weak sense of common interests, and few institutions in the political area that are able independently to achieve the EU's declared ends. Although it is useful, the dialogue merely brings together a state that is strongly defensive about its sovereignty and territoriality with an association where sovereignty is pooled and territoriality diluted. Europe is as much a union of interests as a community of shared values. Moscow sees the blending of values and interests in EU policy and rhetoric as interference in Russian affairs. EU statements about Russian policy in the Chechen conflict have only provoked irritation, as have European declarations about the need for the fair application of the rule of law during the Yukos affair. In these circumstances, the scope for misunderstanding and wasted time is substantial. On many questions, Brussels and Moscow simply talk past each other.

## Prospects for European Integration

Russian foreign policy toward the EU weaves together many strands of Putin's policy of alignment with the Euro-Atlantic community to foster international predictability and support Russia's modernization. At first glance, Russia's relations with the EU appear primarily positive. The EU is not hostile to Russia, nor is it a potentially threatening political-military organization, like NATO. EU-Russian trade relations are vital for the Russian economy, and Brussels provides substantial assistance and expertise for Russia's economic reforms. Moreover, as the EU becomes increasingly reliant on Russian energy supplies, Russia is not the only dependent party in the relationship. In sum, relations between Russia and the EU have great potential to satisfy Russia's need for external interlocutors that provide for a Russian voice on the international stage and that support Russia's internal transformation.

The combination of EU enlargement and the organization's emergence as a security actor, however, raises challenges for Moscow, the first being uncertainty. Russian leadership is unsure of the EU's future role in Europe and its policies toward Russia. In the long term, is there an alliance within the EU in the making? How will the new member states affect the EU's policy toward Russia? Will the EU make more attempts to interfere in Russia's domestic affairs? To what extent will Moscow be able to exploit ties with the old members? More generally, what shape will European security take, and how will Russia assert its voice? There are no clear answers to any of these questions.

The second challenge is psychological. Although he does not want Russia to join the EU, Putin does not want Russia to be isolated on Europe's periphery, subject to developments beyond its control. EU enlargement is blurring the distinction between the "European Union" and the idea of "Europe"—the two ideas are merging. For all his pragmatism, Putin has always affirmed Russia's European vocation and tied the new Russian Federation's destiny with that of Europe. Yet, if Russia is not a member of the EU (an unrealistic prospect), can it still be considered part of Europe? The questions raised by relations with the EU are this fundamental.

Cooperation between a former empire in retreat and an expanding power cannot be expected to come without complications. The border zones between the two—in Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus, as well as in the south Caucasus—will likely feature quite a bit of friction, as lines of power and influence become clearer. This was evident in Russian reactions to the 2003 discussions in Brussels when the EU talked about deploying an ESDP operation to replace the Russian-led peacekeeping mission in Moldova.<sup>26</sup> In public, Moscow reacted calmly against the notion; in private, Russian reactions were a blend of astonishment, anxiety, and concern.



Putin began his presidency seeking more predictable and accommodating international partners for Russia's state consolidation. The EU had pride of place in his vision. By early 2004, the EU has found more ambiguous importance. The EU remains unpredictable, and Russia is little more engaged. In fact, Russia finds itself pushed to the sidelines, facing the reality that a united Europe is being built at the dawn of the twenty-first century—but without Russia.

### **Through Moldova to a United Europe**

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What can be done to bridge the gap in the EU-Russian security dialogue? How can a united Europe without dividing lines be created when Russia remains outside the EU? One potential solution could lie in the development of a more effective institutional framework that would link the EU and Russia in a permanent dialogue on questions of mutual and international concern. In this spirit, the EU-Russian summit in St. Petersburg in May 2003 produced an agreement to create a Permanent Partnership Council between Russia and the EU, designed to act as a clearinghouse on all matters of cooperation.<sup>27</sup> Once in place, the council is to meet more frequently and at different levels than the current mechanisms. Although not irrelevant, this solution highlights a classic EU reflex to seek an institutional or procedural answer to a question that requires attention to substantive outcomes or results. That little progress has been made toward setting up the council since the summit is not surprising.

The EU-Russian security dialogue has devoted enough time since 1999 to declarations. Without practical, ground-level cooperation, the dialogue has become top-heavy and is in danger of toppling over into a heap of words and statements. Concrete cooperation must start on a particular question that brings together both urgency and interest for the EU and the Russian Federation. Optimally, this question should also address concerns that have arisen in Moscow over the two key developments to come in 2004: enlargement and the continuing rise of the EU as Europe's security provider. Finally, the issue should be one on which both the EU and Russia have the means to act.

Conflict settlement in Moldova satisfies all three criteria. With enlargement to Romania in 2007, the EU's external borders will abut Moldova, thereby bringing to the EU's doorstep a host of problems, from human trafficking to illicit smuggling of all sorts. Moldova is Europe's poorest country, and the conflict with its separatist region of Transdniestria, on the left bank of the Dnestr River, lies at the heart of all of its problems. EU member states and officials are well aware that Brussels must assume a more active role in

this conflict. The OSCE has been involved for more than 10 years in negotiations between the two parties but with little success. The EU has far greater interest in settling the conflict, and it has also a more effective range of policy tools at its disposal to achieve this goal and to make it stick. These tools range from leveraging Moldova's EU aspirations to applying the union's array of economic and financial as well as crisis management support.

For its part, Russia has been deeply involved in peacekeeping in the conflict since the establishment of a cease-fire regime in July 1992. At the Istanbul OSCE summit in 1999, Russia agreed to withdraw its forces and equipment (more than 40,000 tons) that remain in the Transdnestrian region by December 31, 2002. For a number of reasons, the Russian Ministry of Defense failed to meet the deadline, which was extended to December 31, 2003. By late 2003, Russia had withdrawn about half of the weaponry and equipment, and much work remains before the completion of the process.

**The border zones between Europe and Russia will likely feature quite a bit of friction.**

Conflict settlement in Moldova requires cooperation between Russia and the EU. In itself, the conflict is nothing like the wars of the Yugoslav dissolution or the conflicts in the Caucasus. It is not an ethnic conflict, and there is no deep-rooted hostility between the populations on either bank of the Dnestr River. The conflict was not a war but a series of small clashes, the roots of which are caused by the desire of the separatist authorities in Transdnestria to retain sovereignty over the affairs of the left bank. As such, cutting a deal between the parties on an appropriate division of competencies inside the same state and making that deal stick does not require a military operation but political energy by mediators and their cooperation.

In the year 2003, the EU and Russia learned they needed to act together in the conflict. In May 2003, the EU Council launched a discussion on the possibility of EU involvement in the deployment of a peace consolidation mission in Moldova to replace the current peacekeeping operation and underpin a settlement between the two parties. In response, in a July 21, 2003, statement, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesman, Aleksandr Yakovlenko, declared, "One should ... avoid any statements or initiatives which complicate the already very difficult negotiations and prematurely distract the attention of their participants from the most vital substantive issues of settlement and lastly that are taken without a prior diplomatic discussion with the use of the well-oiled negotiating mechanisms."<sup>28</sup> Facing the recalcitrance of Russia and, therefore, of Transdnestria,

the EU retreated, even if it remains poised for involvement in a postsettlement security arrangement.

Russia also learned the lesson that unilateral initiatives fail. In mid-November, to the great surprise of the United States and the OSCE, Dmitry Kozak, deputy head of the Russian presidential administration, presented a draft memorandum on a division of competencies between the central authorities and the Transdnistrian leaders. The memorandum would have cre-

ated a new Federal Republic of Moldova that, in practice, attributed so many powers to the federal subject—Transdnistria—that Moldova, in effect, became a confederation. Under intense domestic pressure and without international support for the proposal, Vladimir Voronin, the Moldovan president, did not sign the memo, much to Moscow's ire (reportedly Putin's plane had been readied for a flash visit to Chisinau for a signature

ceremony). The OSCE ministerial meeting at Maastricht in early December 2003 confirmed the collapse of the Russian plan and was one reason for the meeting's failure to produce a joint statement. Almost all of the participating OSCE states called for a return to the multilateral negotiating format and for the deployment of a genuinely multinational peace-support arrangement to underpin any conflict settlement agreement that might be reached.

In the new borderland between the EU and Russia, cooperation is vital for stability and security. To exit the Moldovan dead end, the EU and Russia must develop a common position. Work must occur at two levels. First, Russia and the EU must develop a shared view of a fitting constitutional arrangement to solve the conflict. In this, the EU must be invited to join the current mediation mechanisms which include Russia, the OSCE, and Ukraine. Second, Brussels and Russia must elaborate a joint peace consolidation mission in Moldova. This mission should contain a small military element (up to 100 troops), deployed for a short period of time, and be primarily civilian, deployed for the longer term, and with an extensive mandate across Moldovan territory. Although the current modalities for Russian participation in EU operations allow for only a limited Russian voice, undertaking a joint operation will require joint command and control as well as joint responsibility.

Cooperation over Moldova has an excellent chance of securing the settlement of the conflict, a worthy goal in itself. Cooperation would also have a wider impact on EU-Russian relations, as a first foundation to help build the declared "strategic partnership." The design and deployment of a joint operation would go far in assuaging Russia's concerns with ESDP. Al-

## Conflict settlement in Moldova requires cooperation between Russia and the EU.

though it would not be easy for the EU to consider such an unparalleled undertaking, it is not beyond the reach of a security organization that is still in its formative stage. Finally, cooperative actions in the new border region between Russia and the EU would represent a powerful signal of the reality of a common European security space and the continent's shared fate, without dividing lines.

## Notes

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