

EU-Russia  
relations

# Mirror images In EU-Russia relations

By Irina Bolgova

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT  
STIFTUNG**

FES Regionalbüro für  
Zusammenarbeit und  
Frieden in Europa  
FES Regional Office for  
Cooperation and Peace  
in Europe

FEPS  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



**AMICUS  
EUROPAE**  
FUNDACJA  
ALEKSANDRA  
KWAŚNIEWSKIEGO

**FMS**  
Foundation Max van der Stoep

Fondation  
**Jean Jaurès**

**FONDAZIONE  
GRAMSCI**

**RI RennerInstitut**

**Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)**

Avenue des Arts 46, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium  
+32 (0) 2 234 69 00  
info@feeps-europe.eu  
www.feeps-europe.eu  
@FEPS\_Europe



**Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE)**

Reichsratsstr. 13/5, A-1010 Vienna, Austria  
+43 (0) 1 890 3811 205  
info(at)fes-vienna.org  
www.fes-vienna.org  
@FES\_ROCPE



**Foundation Amicus Europae (AE)**

Aleja Przyjaciół 8/5, 00-565 Warsaw, Poland  
+48 22 622 66 33  
fundacja@fae.pl  
www.fae.pl  
@FAE\_pl



**Fondation Jean-Jaurès (FJJ)**

12 Cité Malesherbes, 75009 Paris, France  
+33 (0)1 40 23 24 00  
www.jean-jaures.org  
contact@jean-jaures.org  
@j\_jaures



**Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS)**

Leeghwaterplein 45, 2521DB, Den Haag, The Netherlands  
+31 70 5500 567  
www.foundationmaxvanderstoel.nl  
info@foundationmaxvanderstoel.nl  
@FMS\_Foundation



**Fondazione Gramsci**

Via Sebino 43a, 00199 Rome, Italy  
+39 06 58 06 646  
info@fondazionegramsci.org  
www.fondazionegramsci.org  
@fondazionegramsci



**Karl-Renner-Institut (RI)**

Karl-Popper-Straße 8, 1100 Wien, Austria  
+43 (01) 804 65 01  
post@renner-institut.at  
www.renner-institut.at  
@RennerInstitut



Policy brief produced in the framework of the project “ReSetting the EU’s agenda towards Russia”. Copyright © 2021 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS).

Cover photo by HelloRF Zcool

Published with the financial support of the European Parliament.

The views expressed in this policy brief are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Parliament or those of FEPS and all other project partners.



## Mirror images in EU-Russia relations

By Irina Bolgova \*

*“Well, now that we have seen each other,” said the Unicorn,  
“If you’ll believe in me, I’ll believe in you. Is that a bargain?”  
Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass*

### Introduction

During the recent joint press conference at the end of his visit to Moscow, EU High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission Josep Borrell emphasised that the EU and Russia “are seeing each other more as a competitor or rival, rather than a partner”.<sup>1</sup> His Russian counterpart, Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov avoided any similar description, and instead underlined the mutual responsibility “for maintaining stability on our common European, or rather Eurasian continent” as “Russia and European countries share common centuries-old history, culture and people-to-people contacts and have a lot in common in the economy”.<sup>2</sup> The word used most frequently by both speakers to describe the main feature of the approaches of Russia and the EU to the substance of their interaction was “differences”.

A thorough analysis of these “differences” is therefore needed in order to determine the roots of the current state of EU-Russia political relations and the potential ways out of these differences.

The hypothesis of this policy brief is that both the EU and Russia share a common vision of the global and continental framework for their relations, but that both misinterpret their respective roles within this framework. The concept of ‘mirror image’ (Bronfenbrenner 1961) in international politics seems to be gaining popularity again in the analysis of international relations. Indeed, the concept is used to explain the nature of the new conflict between Russia and the West and the potential for its de-escalation against the backdrop of a return of paranoia and anxiety (Smith 2018).

---

\* Dr Irina Bolgova is Associate Professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations

<sup>1</sup> Josep Borrell’s remarks at joint press conference with Sergei Lavrov, Moscow, 5 February 2021 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/92661/Russia:%20Remarks%20by%20High%20Representative/Vice-President%20Josep%20Borrell%20at%20the%20joint%20press%20conference%20with%20Foreign%20Minister%20Lavrov](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/92661/Russia:%20Remarks%20by%20High%20Representative/Vice-President%20Josep%20Borrell%20at%20the%20joint%20press%20conference%20with%20Foreign%20Minister%20Lavrov)).

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint press conference following talks with Josep Borrell, Moscow, 5 February 2021 ([www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/-/asset\\_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/4553286](http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/4553286)).

Based on the analyses of mirrored logic in both parties' positions and international behaviour, this policy brief aims to offer commentary on the inherent nature of this logic in the relations between Russia and the EU – a logic which stems from their self-positioning on the global level and vis-à-vis each other. The author's argument is based on the research of official European and Russian documents, and on political analysis of the current state of international relations, global trends in world politics, and bilateral relations.<sup>3</sup>

### Global level: what is weakness and how to overcome it

Both Russia and the EU share an understanding of the current arrangement of international political dynamics. Their official and academic discourse is in a similar vein and refers to the return of great power competition and the revival of geopolitics, pointing to the declining responsibility of America and inevitable conflict between Washington and Beijing. In this evolving global context both Russia and the EU are trying to work out an optimal strategy to deal with the challenges they face.

Official European documents and speeches clearly formulate a vision of the structure and challenges of the international system that have emerged against the backdrop of the Covid-19 crisis<sup>4</sup>. The EU underlines the increasing power vacuum in contemporary world politics caused by America's withdrawal from responsibility within the framework of multilateral organisations, and by the country's emphasis on its dominant 'America First' strategy<sup>5</sup>. In addition, at the initial stage of the Covid-19 crisis in Europe, the decline of the role of America as a responsible global leader was analysed in comparison with the foreign policy behaviour of China, which was able not only to control the spread of the virus within that country successfully, but also to provide extensive assistance to others, with an emphasis on the spirit of solidarity (Tocci 2020).

---

<sup>3</sup> The materials used for the analysis include comments, special reports and analytical notes from the following European think tanks: French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), Royal Institute for International Relations (Egmont Institute), Royal Institute of Elcano, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), Italian Institute of International Relations (IAI), Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), European Bureau of the Carnegie Endowment. The materials also include comments, special reports and analytical notes from a number of European network analytical platforms (EPIN, ETNC) and from key Russian foreign policy think tanks that reflect mainstream opinion on important international issues, and that formulate political recommendations for decision making on foreign policy: Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), Valdai Club, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), and the *International Affairs* and *Russia in Global Affairs* journals. Without pretending to be complete, this list seems to make it possible to single out the main problematic sections in the self-reflection of the EU and Russia and their mutual perceptions.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Borell, J. (2020) 'The Coronavirus pandemic and the New World it is creating', 23 March ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76379/coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76379/coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en)); Borrel, J. (2020) 'The EU in the Multilateral System', 18 September ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/85399/The%20EU%20in%20the%20multilateral%20system](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/85399/The%20EU%20in%20the%20multilateral%20system)).

<sup>5</sup> Donald Trump's foreign policy was considered to be a deviation due to change with new Administration in Washington. That willingness for change was among others reflected in the document 'A new EU-US agenda for global change' JOIN(2020) 22 final, Brussels, 2.12.2020. However, there is a strong sentiment in the expertise that «*the transatlantic community of yesteryear cannot be resurrected*» (E.Lubkemeier (2021) Standing on our Own Feet? Opportunities and Risks of European Self-Defence. SWP Research Paper 1, February. [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2021RP01\\_EuropeanSelfDefence.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2021RP01_EuropeanSelfDefence.pdf)).

At the same time, the European Union is concerned about the growing tensions in relations between Washington and Beijing, which may turn European countries into the main battlefield of a new global confrontation (Borrell 2020a). Both at the supranational level and at the level of national expertise, the emerging structure of international relations is viewed through the prism of a new bipolar confrontation, with direct references to the period of the cold war and the return of geopolitics to international relations (eg, Borrell 2020a, Montbrial 2020, Massolo 2020). This crisis led to a deterioration of the image<sup>6</sup> within the EU both of the US and of China<sup>7</sup>, the latter accentuated by the debates about Beijing's 'mask diplomacy'<sup>8</sup> during the COVID-19 pandemic. The trends towards the return of power tools in world politics, which have been clearly manifested against the background of the current crisis, show the relevance of the new Commission goal-setting that was announced in 2019.<sup>9</sup> These trends are seen as a new window of opportunity for a common European foreign policy (Koenig and Stahl 2020)<sup>10</sup>, conceptualised in the 'Sinatra Doctrine' (referring to the memorable song by Frank Sinatra, 'My Way').<sup>11</sup> The depth of transatlantic cooperation contributes to the EU's vulnerability vis-à-vis the worsening contradictions between China and the US.

Russian academic discourse, and to a lesser extent its official discourse, has meanwhile also internalised the concept of a new bipolarity between America and China and the centrality of their confrontation for the international system (Khudoley 2020). From this perspective, Russia and the EU are geopolitically pushed to the periphery of a new world order and are destined for cooperation.

Russia's global role is undermined by an insufficient level of economic and technological development, both in absolute numbers and in terms of its reliance on international cooperation and its strong dependence on income from energy exports. Russia's assertive foreign policy is not necessarily accompanied by adequate political partnerships, and even less by military partnerships. Both the Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2016<sup>12</sup> and the country's Military Doctrine of 2014<sup>13</sup> accentuate the need to develop defence capabilities within the neighbouring geography, but both documents state that this should nevertheless

---

<sup>6</sup> The paradoxes of a Post-Covid-19 World. Three questions to I. Krastev, 15 June 2020 (<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/paradoxes-post-covid-19-world>).

<sup>7</sup> Borrell, J. (2020) 'China, the United States and us', 31 July ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/83644/china-united-states-and-us\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/83644/china-united-states-and-us_en)).

<sup>8</sup> A term born in 2020 referring to Chinese efforts to prove itself as a responsible global player and gain positive international media attention by the means of providing medical supplies, test kits and technical expertise to countries hit by the COVID-19 pandemics.

<sup>9</sup> Von der Leyen, U. (2019), 'A Union that strives for more – my agenda for Europe', Brussels ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf)).

<sup>10</sup> Also for example, Stahl, A.K. (2020) 'Geopolitics in the time of Coronavirus', 17 July ([www.united-europe.eu/de/2020/07/anna-katharina-stahl-ueberlegen-macht-ueberlegen/](http://www.united-europe.eu/de/2020/07/anna-katharina-stahl-ueberlegen-macht-ueberlegen/)).

<sup>11</sup> 'The Sinatra Doctrine. How the EU Should Deal with the US–China Competition', Brussels, 27 August 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/84484/sinatra-doctrine-how-eu-should-deal-us%E2%80%93china-competition\\_en%20](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/84484/sinatra-doctrine-how-eu-should-deal-us%E2%80%93china-competition_en%20)).

<sup>12</sup> Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 30 November 2016) ([www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk8B6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk8B6BZ29/content/id/2542248)).

<sup>13</sup> Voyennaya Doktrina Rossijskoy Federatsii (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation) approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 25 December 2014 (<https://rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html>)

not lead to an institutionalised military alliance with China.<sup>14</sup> Russia's expeditionary capacities, illustrated by its operation in Syria, are not maintained in its alliance policies. Indeed, in the 2000s Russia abandoned useful, but costly, military facilities in Vietnam and Cuba. The level of asymmetry in relations between Russia and China gives rise to the risk of Russia being trapped in a conflict between America and China. The material basis for Russia–China relations is determined by the gap in the volumes of their national economies. Indeed, this gap also increases the socio-economic imbalance in the development of the two countries' adjacent territories, as well as the imbalance in mutual trade – not only in terms of volume, but also in terms of structure.

It is worth noting the similarity of the strategic response of the EU and Russia to the evolution of the structural environment. Rhetorically both actors are committed to multilateralism as the only way to achieve acceptable stability for the majority of players in the international system. Russian foreign policy sets out to “promote, within bilateral and multilateral frameworks, mutually beneficial and equal partnerships with foreign countries, ... guided by the principles of independence and sovereignty, pragmatism, transparency, predictability, a multidirectional approach and the commitment to pursue national priorities on a non-confrontational basis”,<sup>15</sup> while the EU sets out to “promote a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core”.<sup>16</sup>

These assumptions about the shifts in the global order are shared and operationalised both by Russia and the EU. Counterintuitively, however, the assumptions do not lead to a strategy of bilateral cooperation in order to balance global powers and mitigate growing contradictions. This paradox may be accounted for by a mutual misperception of their level of weakness in the global balance of power.

The EU tends to assess Russian positions as weak not only in the global balance of power, but also in the continental one and in particular in the relations between Moscow and Beijing. Russia perceives its ‘strategic partnership’ with China as leverage against Western dominance. This can be seen, for example, in Lavrov's statement on “no relations with the EU as an organisation”<sup>17</sup> – a statement he symbolically made during his official visit to Beijing. European expertise formulates a perception that this exhortation is unfounded due to the different levels of economic development in China and Russia.

The perception of imbalanced Russia–China relations is at the root of the European assessments of the future of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the EU strategy to

---

<sup>14</sup> In the run-up to the renewal of the 2001 Russia–China Treaty of Friendship, which is planned for 2021, the discussion in Russia is concentrated around the relevance of ‘up-grading’ the document to alliance level. Despite Putin's recent remark at the meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club that a military alliance with China “is certainly imaginable” (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64261>) there is no clear consensus. The existing bilateral documents clearly state the “refusal to establish allied relations” (Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the PRC on the development of a comprehensive strategic partnership for collaboration in the new era – in Russian – Moscow, 5 June 2019 – <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5413>)

<sup>15</sup> Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 30 November 2016) ([www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCkBGZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCkBGZ29/content/id/2542248)).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy’, Brussels, June 2016, p. 8 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf)).

<sup>17</sup> Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions following talks with Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi, Guilin, 23 March 2021 ([www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4647898](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4647898)).



address it. On the one hand, there is a strong concern within the EU that the engagement of some member states with BRI projects in Europe may pose a challenge to the EU's own cohesion.<sup>18</sup> Famous 'systemic rivalry' discourse is accompanied by stressing the need for "full unity" and "a responsibility to ensure consistency with EU law, rules and policies" in cooperating with China.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, EU experts emphasise that against the background of deteriorating political relations between China and other major players in the international arena, the EU and member states remain the only source of development and global legitimacy for Belt and Road projects (Saarela 2018, Roctus 2020). Political discourse emphasises that 'One Belt, One Road' is an example of multilateral cooperation, which means that it can become a natural component of the politics of multilateralism and can be viewed through the prism of European strategies of connectivity (Gehrke 2020). EU integration projects in the post-Soviet space (primarily, the Eastern Partnership) are viewed not as self-contained, but in the context of building interaction with China. As demonstrated by the new EU Strategy for Central Asia,<sup>20</sup> Russian initiatives are not perceived as a significant and viable factor influencing the configuration of multilateral relations in Eurasia. Russia does not occupy an independent place in the spectrum of European discussions on self-positioning in the international arena. In the European understanding of the geopolitical context, Russia is more likely to play the role of a country dependent on a growing China, and consequently intensifying the power competition<sup>21</sup>. In the event of significant economic weakening as a result of the pandemic, it is therefore assumed that Russia will seek to improve relations with the EU, which in turn will then find itself in the position of an influential player again (Biscop 2020).

Despite the impression promoted by the European discourse, Russia is far from naïve in estimating the nature of its 'strategic partnership' with China. The existing economic asymmetry mentioned above and the risk of becoming a "resource appendage" is openly articulated by Russian academia (Torkunov et al 2020). Indeed, this is understood as a challenge for Russia-China relations in the mid-term and long-term perspective. However, Russia's overall autonomy of political decisions and national identity are more stable vis-à-vis direct Chinese influence or the consequences of global landscape shifts than when judged only on the basis of material capabilities. Russia considers the perspective of complex confrontation between China and the US as a serious threat<sup>22</sup>, but the security cooperation

---

<sup>18</sup> 'Towards a new EU policy approach to China: 21st EU-China Summit – April 2019', At a glance, April 2019 ([www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/637913/EPRS\\_ATA\(2019\)637913\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/637913/EPRS_ATA(2019)637913_EN.pdf)).

<sup>19</sup> European Commission and EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2019) 'EU-China – A strategic outlook' ([www.ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlookcommission-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019\\_en](http://www.ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlookcommission-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019_en)).

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy (2019) Joint Communication 'The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership', JOIN (2019) 9 final, Brussels, 15 May . ([https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint\\_communication\\_-\\_the\\_eu\\_and\\_central\\_asia\\_-\\_new\\_opportunities\\_for\\_a\\_stronger\\_partnership.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_-_the_eu_and_central_asia_-_new_opportunities_for_a_stronger_partnership.pdf))

<sup>21</sup> For example, the widely debated interview of French President E. Macron with Economist (<https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english>)

<sup>22</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister S. Ryabkov speech at the discussion "Russia's BRICS Chairmanship in the Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic" at Valdai club, 11.11.2020 (<https://valdaiclub.com/events/own/russia-s-brics-chairmanship-in-the-year-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-an-online-discussion/>)



that has been under active development in the recent years<sup>23</sup> is seen as an advantage not only for geopolitical but also for economic reasons.

At the same time, Russia's 'pivot to the East' represents a larger dynamic than just opposing the West. Accelerated by the 2014 crisis around Ukraine, the development of Russian Asian vector still dates back to Yevgeny Primakov's foreign policy of the mid-1990s (Lukin 2016) and is not limited to relations with China but encompasses dialogue with Japan, India, Vietnam and South Korea, to name only few. Nevertheless, the list underlines the complexity of relations in the Asia Pacific region, with its existing controversies and ad hoc alliances. In developing the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)<sup>24</sup>, Moscow has demonstrated how the relations between India, Pakistan and China may be included in the multilateral forum and provide the trump cards needed for all parties involved. More recently, Moscow's mediator role after the military collision on the India-China border in summer 2020<sup>25</sup> shows the confidence that both sides have in Russian diplomacy.

Russia is traditionally an advocate of the idea of the EU's need to build 'strategic autonomy'<sup>26</sup> away from America. The mandate of the former American president, Donald Trump, was considered promising in terms of the opportunities it offered for Brussels and other European capitals to evaluate the need to create independent institutions and to take some real steps in this direction<sup>27</sup>. While keeping the legacy of 'America first' priorities, the arrival of the new Biden administration in America is assessed to be less arrogant but also more insistent on its allies' commitments, including the need to choose sides in the approaching confrontation with China (Entin and Entina 2020; Gromyko 2020).

Since the migration crisis and Brexit, Russian discourse has mirrored the argument about the existing weaknesses of the EU. Traditional claims about the inability of the EU to find domestic consensus on its common security strategy are currently diversified by discussions about the weakness of solidarity with regard to the pandemic crisis. Russia feels its scientific and organisational superiority in the context of creating its anti-Covid vaccine, and in the context of its technological potential to produce substantial volumes of it<sup>28</sup>. The media discourse also underlines the troubles that the EU has in this area.

The EU's dependence on the will of Washington, which is often mentioned in Russia when the challenges for EU-China interaction are analysed, also seems misleading and stereotyped. In choosing the regions for proactive action, the EU's current 'geopolitical' strategy prioritises Africa as a region where the European ideas of multilateralism, economic autonomy and strategic self-sufficiency may be achieved. From the Russian perspective, this shift in priorities may be seen as a way of escaping from the real challenges. For the EU, it seems to be a natural

---

<sup>23</sup> Press statements following Russia-China talks, 5 June 2019 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60672>).

<sup>24</sup> Official website: [sectsco.org](http://sectsco.org)

<sup>25</sup> How Russia emerged as key mediator in the China-India dispute// EastAsiaForum. 23 October 2020 (<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/10/23/how-russia-emerged-as-key-mediator-in-the-china-india-dispute/>)

<sup>26</sup> Vladimir Poutine répond en exclusivité aux questions de RT France, 11.11.2018 (<https://francais.rt.com/international/55305-vladimir-poutine-repond-exclusivite-questions-rt-france-video>)

<sup>27</sup> There were some signs not only from the European capitals but also from the EU. For example, Juncker Says Europe Can No Longer 'Outsource' Its Protection // RFERL, 09.07.2017 (<https://www.rferl.org/a/juncker-great-eu-defense-cooperation-nato/28537609.html>)

<sup>28</sup> See for example, Interview with Deputy Foreign Minister A. Grushko (*In Russ.*) //Interfax, 04.02.2021 (<https://www.interfax.ru/interview/749279>)

way to overcome internal contradictions on foreign policy consensus, to contribute to a self-sufficient international agenda, and to form new soft alliances if the need to balance persists. Such a geographical opening explains why leaning on Russia in the global competition is not considered to be the only alternative. However, the result does not seem to be any more evident.

Both Russian and European perceptions of the evolving world order are therefore similar, and reflect the position of both actors vis-à-vis transformations and global power shifts. Both use the same wording in trying to adapt their policies to the current changes: pragmatism, geopolitics, multilateralism, and the rule of international law. All these concepts appear in both parties' official discourse and expert reflections. At the same time, the EU and Russia mirror each other when estimating the respective weakening roles in the new balance of power and the need to review their positioning towards each other.

### **Bilateral level: issue of reciprocal recognition**

With regard to both parties' drive for status on the global level, there is a twofold problem of reciprocal recognition as a peer authority (for Russia) and as a consolidated agency (for the EU). Russia's vision of its relations with the EU resides within a broader perspective of that country's historical presence as a European power on the continent. Its discourse referring to the turning points in Europe's international politics and security and to Russia's respective role tries to promote the continuity of Russia's international identity (Lavrov 2016). Having this perspective in mind, Minister Lavrov's recent remarks that the EU should not be confused with Europe<sup>29</sup> seem to fit into Russia's general self-perception as a European country and its efforts to find a solution for the conundrum of the nexus between geography and politics.

For its part, the EU imputes Russia's lack of a pro-European stance to that country's domestic deviations. Linking the reasons for the crisis in EU-Russia relations to the domestic political developments in Russia<sup>30</sup>, the EU tends to advance the idea that the enhancement of relations would become possible with a different political leadership. As a result, both parties wait for respective changes, but with no clear result. What is more important is that both consider this anticipation of change as a foray into domestic politics.

This ideational mirroring exists alongside opposing causality links. In Europe's analysis, Russia wants to disaggregate the EU, following the realpolitik logic of 'divide and rule' (Roth 2009; de Jong 2016; Karlsen 2019). However, the EU's internal cohesion has always been seen in Russia as a natural way of increasing stability and of strengthening the global positions of both sides. As Russia's President Vladimir Putin stated in his Bundestag speech back in 2001: "as for European integration, we do not just support these processes, but look at them with hope... I am just of the opinion that Europe will reinforce its reputation of a strong and truly independent centre of world politics soundly and for a long time if it succeeds in bringing together its own potential and that of Russia, including its human, territorial and natural resources and its economic, cultural and defence potential" (Putin 2001). The latest European

---

<sup>29</sup> Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of the Republic of Finland Pekka Haavisto, St Petersburg, 15 February 2021 ([https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya\\_s\\_uchastiem\\_ministra/-/asset\\_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/4574102](https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/4574102))

<sup>30</sup> Russia: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EP debate on his visit to Moscow. Brussels, February 2, 2021 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/92876/russia-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-debate-his-visit-moscow\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/92876/russia-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-debate-his-visit-moscow_en))

assumption is based on the assessment of Moscow's attempts to find political groups or members within the EU ready to recognise Russia as a trustworthy partner. Russia's explanation of these attempts has a different origin. The aspiration for international authority – in the absence of consolidated recognition – can only be backed up by cooperation with certain individual actors, driven by their particular interests that might coincide within the 'Russian question' on an ad hoc basis. That's why Minister Lavrov was so explicit in underlining the positive 'consistency' of Russia – Finland relations in contrast with the 'sporadic' character of Moscow's dialogue with Brussels<sup>31</sup>.

Taking Russia's long history of political relations with the European states into consideration, the country is clearly more comfortable continuing its interaction on a bilateral basis. But the same is true for the European member states that are interested in dealing with Russia. Despite the level of political integration in the EU, the most promising, ambitious and efficient initiatives have ironically come from the member states, and not from Brussels – for example, the French initiative of an EU-Russia 'Energy dialogue',<sup>32</sup> or the Meseberg initiative launched by Germany,<sup>33</sup> in the aftermath of French President Nicolas Sarkozy's personal involvement in the peace settlement process following the Caucasus war in August 2008.

The same logic reversal can be seen in the military campaign in Syria, which is mainly considered by the Western states as Russian malicious willingness to "deoccidentalise"<sup>34</sup> the region. However, it is worth looking back to Putin's speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 when he urged for the creation of a broad international coalition that would fight against terrorism in the Middle East.<sup>35</sup> This Russian foreign policy mantra reflects the need to find new formats and new common grounds to cooperate with Western countries on an equal footing, but is not accepted by the EU as a part of its 'multilateralism' agenda.

Russia is seen in Europe as a spoiler for the liberal globalisation model because of the country's continuing resistance to domestic political reforms<sup>36</sup>. From a Russian perspective, the negative impact of Western sanctions on the Russian national economy is exacerbated by the fact that Russia is systemically included in the globalized world economic system<sup>37</sup>. Russia sees sanctions themselves as a symbol of the decline of the WTO free-trade model, which it considers as being undermined by its initial proponents.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Foreign Minister of the Republic of Finland Pekka Haavisto, St Petersburg, February 15, 2021 ([https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meroprivatiya\\_s\\_uchastiem\\_ministra/-/asset\\_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/4574102](https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meroprivatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/4574102))

<sup>32</sup> See: [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/international-cooperation/key-partner-countries-and-regions/russia/eu-russia-energy-dialogue\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/international-cooperation/key-partner-countries-and-regions/russia/eu-russia-energy-dialogue_en).

<sup>33</sup> 'Germany and Russia call for new security committee' (2010) *EU Observer*, 7 June (<https://euobserver.com/foreign/30223>)

<sup>34</sup> The term used by Thomas Gomart, Director of IFRI.

<sup>35</sup> Putin took part in the plenary meeting of the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in New York, 28 September 2015 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>).

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed review of existing perspectives on Russia's role in the rules-based order see (Gotz&Merlen 2018)

<sup>37</sup> Vladimir Putin spoke at the plenary session of the 22<sup>nd</sup> St Petersburg International Economic Forum. May 25, 2018. (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57556>)

<sup>38</sup> This point was explicitly underlined from the very beginning of the Russia-West crisis. As Minister Lavrov has put it in an interview: "I don't think that economic sanctions are being considered seriously from the point of your responsibility of the West in the international economic system. [...]if the West, [...], is ready to sacrifice its reputation as a reliable partner for the entire world economy, and for the entire world financial system, [...], then it's up to them to decide."// Interview of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to "Bloomberg TV", Moscow,

At the same time, there is a clear similarity in both sides' regret about the failure of the concept of "the common European home".<sup>39</sup> This concept is symbolic of the periods that were marked by a specific political will to move closer to the adversary: de Gaulle's "Europe from the Atlantic Ocean to Urals" reincarnated with Gorbachev's "new political thinking" and the metaphor about a house with different entrances where people have to communicate for common purposes (Gorbachev 1987). The latest iteration of this concept dates back to 2010 when Putin called for "Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok" (Putin 2010), underlining not only the cultural closeness but also the common economic and security interests that have continent-wide repercussions.

After 2014 the rhetoric on both sides starts to lament the lost opportunities. Both the EU and Russia mutually blame each other for the collapse of the dream that flourished in the 1990s and that began to peter out in the 2010s.

Alongside this similarity, a desynchronisation is also evident. The inertia of the outdated models was astonishing during the last Russia-EU summit in January 2014. Against the background of the Ukrainian domestic political crisis and large-scale Maidan protests, both Putin and the then European Commission president, José Manuel Barroso, referred to a strategic partnership and a common economic and humanitarian space<sup>40</sup>. Within a few months, the EU started to become disappointed with Russian policy in Ukraine, and this disappointment was clear in all official contributions from the political leaders of the EU and member states. Russia still held on to the idea of further cooperation with Europe, and Russian foreign policy in 2016 continued to state the creation of a common European space as a priority.<sup>41</sup> When political dialogue between Russia and the EU was suspended because of the Ukrainian crisis and the Crimean issue in 2014, Moscow tried to use the instruments of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to promote communication between the respective Commissions. It was only in October 2020 that Lavrov gave a toughly worded statement on the low level of EU-Russia communication and on his country's readiness to break off any dialogue with Brussels. Such tough rhetoric was described by the analysts as long overdue (Lukyanov 2020, Timofeev 2021) and as finally overcoming the gap between political reality and its irrelevant conceptualisation.

Both parties nevertheless believe that time is on their side. The EU believes that the Western economic sanctions will have long-term consequences and undermine Russia's precarious national economy, which will finally be proved to be standing on feet of clay.

Moscow likewise bases its strategy on the perception of time as an opportunity to gain more benefits for its future relations with the EU. According to Russian opinion, the EU is to finally

---

14 May 2014 ([https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/ua/-/asset\\_publisher/ktn0ZLTvbbS3/content/id/60498?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_ktn0ZLTvbbS3&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_ktn0ZLTvbbS3\\_languageId=en\\_GB](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/ua/-/asset_publisher/ktn0ZLTvbbS3/content/id/60498?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_ktn0ZLTvbbS3&_101_INSTANCE_ktn0ZLTvbbS3_languageId=en_GB))

<sup>39</sup> Huber-Rodier, J. (2016) 'Europe-Russie: impossible "maison commune"', *Les Echos*, May ([www.lesechos.fr/2016/05/%20europe-russie-limpossible-maison-commune-1111332](http://www.lesechos.fr/2016/05/%20europe-russie-limpossible-maison-commune-1111332)); or Géza Andreas von Geyr, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Russian Federation, Open lecture at HSE University, Moscow, 18 November 2020 ([https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/building-europe-s-future/?sphrase\\_id=72502537](https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/building-europe-s-future/?sphrase_id=72502537)).

<sup>40</sup> Russia – EU Summit. January 28, 2014. Brussels (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20113>).

<sup>41</sup> Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 30 November 2016) ([www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk8B6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk8B6BZ29/content/id/2542248)).

accept the distinct character of Russia's political stance in Eurasia and in the global political system. The successes of Russia's foreign policy, which seem to be evident and appreciated in the non-Western world, will create the necessary foundation for the new type of political relations between Russia and the EU. This new model should exclude the concept of human rights from its cooperation agenda, along with anything that can be considered as an involvement in Russia's domestic affairs.

Russia's recent estimations on the possibility of finding some common ground with the EU lie in the sphere of cooperation with the Asia Pacific region, and China in particular (eg, Kortunov 2018). Russia's logic is to use this region for the resources that are needed for further development and for political support for a world that is not dominated by the West. With such a newly acquired toolkit it would be easier for Russia to take on the image of an equal partner. The 'Greater Eurasia' project, which was officially announced by Putin at the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum in June 2016<sup>42</sup> and further elaborated in his presidential address in December that year, would play an important role in its global stance.<sup>43</sup> The Greater Eurasia Partnership initiative mirrors the previous narrative of a "united Europe built at several sites at once" (Lavrov 2008). While the focus of Greater Eurasia is more to the East geographically, the EU remains the actor whose attention Moscow primarily seeks. Russian foreign policy envisages the creation of a multilateral system of viable economic partnerships with China as the best card for Russia to establish more solid and convincing grounds for new formats of interaction with the EU (Suslov 2016). In this context, Russia underlines the inclusive character of the initiative and welcomes European countries that are tempted by new trade opportunities (Shuvalov 2016).

## Conclusions

To sum up, the mirror image alongside reversed causality is relevant for all issues involving interactions between the EU and Russia. Both parties share a similar vision of the key components of regional and world politics: neither party denies the indivisible nature of Eurasian security, the growth of great power competition or their own vulnerability vis-à-vis the challenges. Both parties also believe on a rational level that their partnership is to some degree unavoidable. However, both have very emotional explanations for the reasons why such a partnership is not on the agenda. This emotional irrationality is caused not by a specific political event but by deep roots of self-definition in relation to the other. The recurring question is where Europe ends and where Russia begins.

What complicates the analysis is the inconsistent nature of signals from both sides, which results from the complex character of any political system. While each party tries to simplify and schematise the explanations for the other's behaviour, each also tends to miss its internal controversies and to overestimate the level of clarity of an action. How can Moscow underline its willingness to deal with a strong and united Europe while at the same time cooperating with right-wing parties or with separate member states? How can the EU criticise the Russian

---

<sup>42</sup> Putin, V. (2016) Speech at the plenary session of the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, 17 June 2016 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52178>).

<sup>43</sup> Presidential address to the Federal Assembly, 1 December 2016 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>).

“dream of dismantling the European Union”<sup>44</sup> if there is no clear-cut Russian strategy within the EU itself?

As a result, the sphere of cooperation has become increasingly narrow – to the point that the Alexei Navalny case, whatever its importance for Russian domestic affairs, has now become the only issue in the political relations between two major actors in international relations.

### Recommendations

As was indicated during Josep Borrell’s recent visit to Moscow, the two parties consider that global healthcare, climate change, science and education are workable spheres for cooperation.<sup>45</sup>

The pragmatism announced in the EU-Russia relations means that the parties should put aside the idea of a “common European house” and their emotional perceptions of “common values”.

The Chinese factor in Eurasia is becoming increasingly dominant for both the EU and Russia, and both feel vulnerable. If the EU wants to influence China’s methods of regional foreign policies and multilateralism, Brussels should think of incorporating Russian instruments into its toolkit. It would seem pragmatic and of mutual interest to include the components of EU-Russia interactions in the framework of cooperation with China, both regionally and sectorally where applicable. Amalgamating the European integration principles, the EAEU may be considered a useful instrument for promoting the EU-based principles of multilateralism in the space that is covered by the Belt and Road Initiative.

Following the five principles of the former EU High representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Federica Mogherini<sup>46</sup>, the development of academic ties, educational programmes and exchange projects should be continued. Ironically, the distance learning obliged by Covid-19 has made this easier than before.

The shifts in global order have provoked changes in the nature of international institutions. They thus seem to be becoming less of a long-term arrangement based on a balance of power, and more of an ad hoc diplomacy instrument based on the balance of interests. Cooperation with contemporary Russia may thus become possible in the spheres of coinciding interest.

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview of Emmanuel Macron with Swedish SVT channel, 2 September 2018 ([www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/frankrikes-president-om-akesson-sd-inte-kompatibel-med-svenska-varderingar](http://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/frankrikes-president-om-akesson-sd-inte-kompatibel-med-svenska-varderingar)).

<sup>45</sup> Lavrov’s remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference following talks with Borrell, Moscow, 5 February 2021 ([www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/minister\\_speeches/-/asset\\_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/4553286](http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/4553286)).

<sup>46</sup> Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council, Brussels, 14 March 2016 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/5490/remarks-by-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-at-the-press-conference-following-the-foreign-affairs-council\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/5490/remarks-by-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-at-the-press-conference-following-the-foreign-affairs-council_en))



## References

- Biscop, S. (2020) 'Weaker together or weaker apart? Great power relations after the coronavirus', *Asia Europe Journal*, 18, 231-234.
- Borrell, J. (2020a) 'Embracing Europe's power', *International Politics and Society*, 25 February ([www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/article/show/embracing-europes-power-4095/25.02](http://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/article/show/embracing-europes-power-4095/25.02))
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1961) 'The mirror image in Soviet-American relations: A social psychologist's report', *Journal of Social Issues*, 17(3), 45-56.
- Entin, M. and Entina, E. (2020) 'The EU will not break free from America's Amiable Stranglehold', Russian International Affairs Council, 19 November (<https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-eu-will-not-break-free-from-america-s-amiable-stranglehold/>)
- Gehrke, T. (2020). After Covid-19: economic security in EU-Asia connectivity. *Asia Europe Journal*, 18, 239-243. (<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10308-020-00579-y.pdf>)
- Gorbachev, M. (1987). *Perestroika: New thinking for our country and the world*. New York: Harper & Row, 254 p.
- Götz E. & Merlen C.-R. (2019). 'Russia and the question of world order', *European Politics and Society*, 20:2, 133-153. DOI: [10.1080/23745118.2018.1545181](https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1545181)
- Gromyko A.(2020) Europe after the US elections: between the past and the unknown / *Russian International Affairs Council*, 17 December ([https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/comments/europe-after-the-us-elections-between-the-past-and-the-unknown/?sphrase\\_id=75404345](https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/comments/europe-after-the-us-elections-between-the-past-and-the-unknown/?sphrase_id=75404345))
- Jong de, S. (2016). Confuse, Divide and Rule-How Russia Drives Europe Apart. IES Policy Brief Issue 2016/2, March 2016 ([http://aei.pitt.edu/82523/1/Policy\\_Brief\\_2016\\_2.pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/82523/1/Policy_Brief_2016_2.pdf)).
- Karlsen, G.H. Divide and rule: ten lessons about Russian political influence activities in Europe. *Palgrave Commun* 5, 19 (2019). (<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0227-8>).
- Khudoley, K. (2020) Russia and the West: A Second Cold or the First Cool War?. *Russia in Global Affairs*. 3 November. (<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russia-west-first-cool-war/>).
- Koenig, N. and Stahl, A. (2020) 'How the coronavirus pandemic affects the EU's geopolitical agenda', Jacques Delors Centre, 24 June ([https://hertieschool-f4e6.kxcdn.com/fileadmin/20200424\\_EU\\_Solidarity\\_Koenig\\_Stahl.pdf](https://hertieschool-f4e6.kxcdn.com/fileadmin/20200424_EU_Solidarity_Koenig_Stahl.pdf)).
- Kortunov, A. (2018) 'One more time on Greater Europe and Greater Eurasia', Russian International Affairs Council, 2 October (<https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/one-more-time-on-greater-europe-and-greater-eurasia/>)
- Lavrov, S. (2008) 'Russian Foreign Policy and a New Quality of the Geopolitical Situation', *Diplomatic Yearbook 2008*, Moscow.
- Lavrov, S. (2016) 'Russian Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective', *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 2 April-June (<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russias-foreign-policy-in-a-historical-perspective/>).



Lukin A. (2016) Russia's Pivot to Asia: Myth or Reality? *Strategic Analysis*, 40:6, 573-589  
DOI: 10.1080/09700161.2016.1224065

Lukyanov, F. (2020) 'Is Russia's dialogue with the EU coming to an end', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 26 October (<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russias-dialogue-with-eu-coming-to-end/>).

Massolo G. (2020) 'USA-Cina, chi paga il conto della guerra fredda', Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), 20 July ([www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/usa-cina-chi-paga-il-conto-della-guerra-fredda-27071](http://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/usa-cina-chi-paga-il-conto-della-guerra-fredda-27071)).

Montbrial, T. de (2020) 'Conséquences et leçons d'un virus', French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) editorials, 1 July ([www.ifri.org/fr/publications/editoriaux-de-lifri/consequences-lecons-dun-virus](http://www.ifri.org/fr/publications/editoriaux-de-lifri/consequences-lecons-dun-virus)).

Putin, V. (2001) Vystuplenie v Bundestage FRG [Address at Bundestag, FRG], 25 September ([www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340](http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340)).

Putin, V. (2010) 'Von Lissabon bis Wladiwostok', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 November ([www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/putin-plaedoyer-fuer-wirtschaftsgemeinschaft-von-lissabon-bis-wladiwostok-1.1027908](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/putin-plaedoyer-fuer-wirtschaftsgemeinschaft-von-lissabon-bis-wladiwostok-1.1027908)).

Roctus, J. (2020) 'Remolding China's "Empty" Belt and Road Initiative: An Opportunity for the EU', Security Policy Brief No. 128, Egmont Institute, June ([www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2020/06/spb128-Jasper-Roctus.pdf?type=pdf](http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2020/06/spb128-Jasper-Roctus.pdf?type=pdf)).

Roth M. (2009) Bilateral Disputes between EU Member States and Russia. CEPS Working Paper No 319 (<https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/bilateral-disputes-between-eu-member-states-and-russia-2/>)

Saarela A. (2018) A new era in EU-China relations: more wideranging strategic cooperation? DG EXPO/B/PolDep/Note/2018\_04 July. ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/570493/EXPO\\_STU\(2018\)570493\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/570493/EXPO_STU(2018)570493_EN.pdf))

Shuvalov, I. (2016) Interview of the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, RIA news agency, 5 September (<https://ria.ru/20160905/1476104887.html>)

Smith, N.R. (2018) 'The re-emergence of a "mirror image" in West-Russia relations?', *International Politics*, 55(5), 575-594.

Suslov, D. (2016) 'In the different spaces: New Agenda for Russia-EU Relations', *Valdai Papers*, #49 (in Russian) (<http://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/22144/>).

Timofeev, I. (2021) 'Why Russia-EU relations remain stable against all odds', Russian International Affairs Council, 3 February (<https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/why-russia-eu-relations-remain-stable-against-all-odds/>)

Tocci, N. (2020) 'International Order and the European Project in Times of COVID-19', IAI Commentaries Issue 20/09 ([www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaicom2009.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaicom2009.pdf)).

Torkunov, A.V., Streltsov D.V. and Koldunova, E.V. (2020) 'Russia's Pivot to the East: Achievements, Problems, and Prospects', *Polis. Political Studies*. No. 5. pp. 8-21 (in Russian).

**About the author**

**Dr Irina V. Bolgova** is associate professor at the Department of applied international analysis at MGIMO-University. She also is research fellow in the Center for Eurasian Studies at MGIMO-University. Dr Bolgova holds a Ph.D. in History. Her sphere of scientific interests includes European Union politics towards the post-soviet space, international processes in Eurasia, Eurasian integration.

