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# EU-Russian relations: Normative rivalry or pragmatic partnership?

By Barbara Roggeveen

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## EU-Russian Relations: Normative rivalry or pragmatic partnership?

By Barbara Roggeveen \*

### Introduction

Relations between Russia and the European Union have deteriorated enormously over the last two decades and reached an absolute standstill in the wake of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Although EU-Russian relations are likely to remain tense while Russia refrains from implementing the Minsk agreements, there are several areas of interest through which the EU can secure a more productive position vis-à-vis its eastern neighbour.

The first half of this paper explores two separate but interconnected developments in Russian foreign policy – as reflected in official discourse – under the Putin regime. The paper first explores three shifts in Russia's positioning towards the European Union, and then demonstrates the ways in which these discursive shifts align with changing notions of Russia's own role in global politics, as well as Putin's 'civilisational' pursuits in the Eurasian sphere. The second half of the paper translates these shifts into a variety of policy recommendations for the European Union. Firstly, it is proposed that the EU should pursue selective yet constructive engagement with the Russian Federation, particularly in the Arctic region. Secondly, two ways are set out by which the EU can secure a stronger position in relation to Russia through people-to-people contact. Finally, it is posited that although Russia would like to frame the EU as a normative rival, the success of this endeavour largely depends on the EU's response to it. Ultimately, the EU decides whether it allows Russia to position itself as such, or whether it pushes Russia towards a pragmatic partnership.

### Changing attitudes towards the EU: from partnership to rivalry

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow initially aspired to join the so-called 'community of civilised states' (Haukkala 2016). To this end, the new Russian leadership agreed to adopt a variety of norms set by the EU that related to democracy and good governance. During the 1990s, it became increasingly clear that this commitment was largely perfunctory, as Russia made little attempt to adopt and implement EU norms and policies.

Inspired not only by Russia's former position in the Soviet Union but also by a deeply rooted sense of Russian 'greatness' dating back to the Slavophile movement, the new Russian leadership saw itself as standing on an equal footing with 'the West'. Navigating between this self-image of Russia as a leading actor on the global stage and the political instability that followed after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a pragmatic post-Soviet leadership paid lip service to being included in the European project, whilst lacking the intention of becoming an

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actual EU member state. It was not until 1999, however, when Vladimir Putin came to power, that Russia explicitly started to distance itself from the EU's normative agenda.

As Russian elites have grown increasingly sceptical of the EU's intentions in the eastern neighbourhood, the European Union has become progressively framed as a competitor in what Russia perceives to be its post-Soviet zone of influence (Allison 2006). Presenting themselves as 'torchbearers' of a more just world order, Russian political actors speak out against the EU's 'undue influences' in the eastern neighbourhood. In a speech in 2016, for example, former prime minister Dmitry Medvedev stated that the European Union – in cooperation with the United States – strives to thwart "the formation of a more just and polycentric international system, with the aim to maintain their dominance in world affairs, and to enforce their will on others" (Medvedev 2016). Whilst becoming progressively critical of EU enlargement to the East, Russian elites have begun to disassociate themselves from the European project. The Russian leadership nevertheless continues to present the EU as an *exemplary model of regional integration*, which should be followed in Russia's own integration project in the Eurasian sphere – as will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

In this narrative, the EU is positively assessed as an imperfect but *resilient* union. In a speech in 2013, for example, then prime minister Dmitry Medvedev stated that – in the formation of a Eurasian partnership – Russia should "take into account the international experience [of other supranational organisations], and in particular the experience of the European Union" (Medvedev 2013). Similarly, in an article published by the Russian State Duma committee on Eurasian integration, the former Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev argues that "although there are plenty of reasons to criticise the EU, they show vitality and resilience in the face of crisis" (Nazarbayev 2011). In the same article, Nazarbayev declares that a Eurasian partnership should be based on a similar model.

This moderately positive assessment of European integration as an imperfect but resilient project is gradually substituted by a predominantly critical rhetoric. In an article written in 2015, for example, Duma deputy Sergei Naryshkin stated that "the very concept of the European Union is bursting at the seams. Faced with new challenges, [the EU] has shown to be ineffective, and the European bureaucracy powerless and unwieldy" (Naryshkin 2015). With Russian elites growing increasingly *critical* of the European project, the discourse that framed the European Union as an exemplary model of regional integration was slowly replaced with a discourse that presents the EU as a 'cautionary tale'.

At this point, various anti-liberal tropes of 'the West', which already existed in the conservative fringes of the discursive field, began to take centre stage in the leadership's political rhetoric surrounding the EU. The Russian leadership started to define Russia's place in the contemporary world by counterposing it to a 'morally depraved' and 'lost' West.

This discursive turn is clearly captured in the derogatory concept of 'Gayropa', which has become popular among Russian conservatives in the Putin era to express a moral division between Russia and 'the West'. A text published by the State Duma committee on Eurasian integration, for example, warns of a "Western-style globalisation" in which people are "forced to adjust to the western European standards of LGBT joy" (Kramarenko 2015). Adopting a similarly homophobic rhetoric, Vladimir Putin states in a *Financial Times* interview that the LGBT community should not be allowed to "overshadow the culture, traditions, and family values of millions of people making up the core population" (Putin 2019).

Through this rhetoric, the Russian leadership has started to frame the EU as being in a state of crisis – both economically (focusing on the recession), politically (focusing on disintegration), and morally (focusing on LGBT rights and immigration). In the same *Financial Times* interview, for example, Putin states that “migrants can kill, plunder and rape with impunity [in the EU] because their rights as migrants must be protected”. He argues that the “liberal idea has become obsolete, [as] it has come into conflict with the interest of the overwhelming majority of the population” (ibid). Here and elsewhere, Putin talks extensively about the need to protect Russian society against immoral influences from the European Union.

Importantly, although the particular ways in which this rhetoric functions are specific to the Russian case, Russia’s rhetoric also fits within a wider neoconservative response to globalisation and modernity: these anti-liberal narratives are part of a wider discourse that operates well beyond the Russian context through which a supposed ‘oppressed majority’ is framed as the victim of a moralising ‘liberal order’. Feeding into a disappearing sense of community, these neoconservative narratives operate as a unifying mechanism in what is presented as an otherwise fragmented and globalised world. It is visible in various forms throughout western Europe; for example, in the rhetoric of far-right, anti-establishment politicians such as Marine Le Pen in France and Thierry Baudet in the Netherlands but also in the anti-globalisation language of various Brexit campaigners in the United Kingdom.

### **Changing understandings of Russia’s role in world politics: Russia as a leading actor in the Eurasian sphere**

Concurrently with these broad discursive and attitudinal shifts towards the European Union, it can be seen that Russia is growing increasingly confident in the pursuit of its own integration project in the Eurasian sphere. Duma deputy Tatyana Moskalkova, for example, states that Eurasian integration and the subsequent creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) have been the direct effect of “Russia’s complicated relationship with the West”, and she argues that – “in conditions reminiscent of the cold war” – Russia has been forced to “strengthen economic and humanitarian ties with EAEU member states, [as well as] relations with the Asian countries” (Moskalkova 2015).

Importantly, this turn towards a Eurasian partnership aligns with changing understandings of Russia’s role in world politics and the rise of a civilisational discourse in Russian foreign policy. The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept – a strategic document published periodically by the Russian Federation to define priority areas and objectives in its foreign policy – first introduces the notion of a “plurality of coexisting civilizations” in official discourse (Linde 2016). The document reads that “it is for the first time in contemporary history that global competition is acquiring a *civilizational* dimension” (Kremlin 2008). Throughout the 2010s, claims to a Eurasian partnership – and Russia’s markedly *civilisational* role within it – became increasingly prevalent in Russian foreign policy discourse.

A Duma report from 2014, for example, reads that “the Western winds have sought to bring European values under the guise of saving mankind [but] the collapse of this model has provided us with a new opportunity – the Eurasian Union”. The report then continues that the contradictions that exist between Europe and Eurasia are “not economic but civilizational”, stating that – contrary to the EU – the “civilizational structure of the Eurasian Union is based on the values of justice, duty, [and] mutual respect” (State Duma 2014). Elsewhere, Duma deputy Sergei Naryshkin argues that Russia should have a leading role in

the Eurasian partnership, given its “wealth of experience in dialogue between civilizations [...] in the East and West” (Naryshkin 2016).

In the early 2010s, Russia appeared to be pursuing a modest integration project based around economic cooperation between the so-called ‘*troika*’ states – Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. In a speech in 2014, for example, Vladimir Putin declared that “Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan are moving to a fundamentally new level of interaction, creating a common space for the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour” (Putin 2014a). Putin referred to the signing of the treaty as a “truly historical [event] that opens up the broadest prospects for the development of our economies and the well-being of our citizens” (ibid). In the same speech, he described the Eurasian partnership as a “fundamentally new model of good-neighbourliness and interaction between the peoples of the Great Eurasian space”, and he argued that this alliance is based on “trust, shared historical experience, friendship, and mutual support” (ibid).

From 2015 onwards, a steady expansion of the Eurasian partnership has been seen, with Kyrgyzstan and Armenia being formally included in the Eurasian project. At a press conference about the future of the Eurasian Economic Union, Putin stated that “the Eurasian *troika* has now been turned into the Eurasian *five*” (Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) – which form the core states that Russia places at the centre of its civilisational endeavour – and he argued that the inclusion of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan “opens up the broadest horizons for our socio-economic development” (Putin 2014b).

At the same press conference, Putin stated that “the Eurasian Union is open to work with *all* partners [...] both in the East and the West” (ibid). Here and elsewhere, this rhetoric of openness and willingness to cooperate is used to counterpose a non-discriminatory Russia to an exclusionary EU. Through this discourse, Russian political actors have increasingly criticised the EU’s mechanisms for norm compliance in central and eastern Europe, and they argue that a “hypocritical EU” has made false promises of accession to incentivise pro-European policy reforms in the shared neighbourhood. These political actors furthermore criticise the European Union’s carrot-and-stick-approach, arguing that the EU relies much more on the stick than the carrot.

Meanwhile, Russia has gradually broadened its interests eastwards to incorporate non-post-Soviet partners such as China and South Korea in the Eurasian project. A Duma report from 2017, for example, reads that “work has now begun on the formation of a Russian-Chinese agreement within the Eurasian Partnership [which aims to] merge the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Pact, ASEAN, and the Commonwealth of Independent States” (State Duma 2017). Elsewhere, a 2018 Duma report describes closer ties with China as “the single most promising event” in the development of the Eurasian project (State Duma 2018).

This suggestion of merging the various institutional structures across Eurasia is increasingly referred to as the *Comprehensive Eurasian Partnership*, through which Russia aims to build a transnational political community in close cooperation with China. While the Russian leadership initially focused on economic cooperation, Sino-Russian relations are now increasingly presented through a common foreign policy lens. Russia’s foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, for example, stated in a 2017 speech that “Russia and China currently have the best relations in the history of our countries [...] with cooperation on a regional and global level on the rise”. Lavrov then continued that “it is our common assessment [...] that coordination of actions by Moscow and Beijing in the international arena is a key factor in maintaining global

stability” (Lavrov 2017). Placing its relationship with China in opposition to deteriorating relations with the European Union, the Russian leadership has started to present a Sino-Russian partnership in terms of *mutual trust* and *common values* – framing it as a way to challenge a Western hegemony in the international sphere.

Additionally, alongside the broadening of the ‘Eurasian horizon’, the Russian leadership gradually changed the topical scope of the Eurasian partnership from an *institutional* collaboration to a markedly *civilisational* alliance. In a 2017 speech, for example, Putin referred to the Eurasian region as “not just an abstract geopolitical construct but [...] a truly civilisational project that is directed towards the future” (Putin 2017). Similarly, a Duma report from 2019 stated that the Eurasian Union aims to become “a leader of global growth and civilizational progress” (State Duma 2019).

Framing the Eurasian partnership in civilisational terms, the Russian leadership increasingly promotes a collective identity that transcends the territorial boundaries of the Russian state. Presenting Eurasian space as a transnational politico-cultural community, Russia places the ‘Eurasian alliance’ in a normative hierarchy with other international communities such as the European Union and – more broadly – ‘the West’. Through this civilisational discourse, Russian foreign policy actors invoke an anti-liberal axis that aims to unite not only the post-Soviet countries in eastern Europe and central Asia but also a major actor such as China.

This inclusion of China in the Russian-Eurasian project is particularly interesting because of the power imbalance that characterises the Sino-Russian relationship. However, although Russia is evidently the weaker actor in economic terms, the Russian leadership seems to circumvent this problem – at least temporarily – by presenting itself as standing on an equal footing with China in terms of *subjective status*.

Lastly, in framing the EU model as inappropriate for the Eurasian sphere, the Russian leadership points towards the existence of a distinctly Russian-Eurasian approach towards international politics. Through this discourse, Russian political actors emphasise Russia’s position as an autonomous decision maker, particularly in relation to the European Union. At the same time, Sergei Prozorov demonstrates that these narratives do not constitute a “zero-sum antagonistic relation to EU policies” but rather a demand for “strategic intersubjectivity” through which Russia and the EU can be treated as equal actors in the international sphere (Prozorov 2006).

### **The EU needs a strategic Russia doctrine**

Although EU-Russian relations are systematically discussed in terms of conflict and rivalry on the basis of normative differences, there is no reason to assume that conflicting normative agendas should necessarily lead to problematic relations between the two actors (Casier 2013). While being aware of the different normative paradigms that underlie European and Russian foreign policies, the European Union should thus pursue a pragmatic approach towards Russia based on selective yet constructive engagement. Currently, however, the EU treats dialogue as a *reward* rather than a necessary tool to improve relations with its eastern neighbour.

From a strategic perspective, the European Union would do well in taking the first steps in resuming dialogue with Russia. After all, a proactive policy would place the EU in a much stronger position to control the narrative vis-à-vis Russia in the long run. This would require the EU to articulate a coherent vision towards the Russian Federation, but also – more broadly



– to think strategically about its role in a multipolar world, as well as the types of relationships it wants to pursue with its other main counterparts in the international sphere (eg, China, Turkey and the United States). The articulation of a unanimous European policy towards Russia appears to be difficult, however, given the widely diverging views held by individual EU member states – views that at times are fuelled by emotion and memory politics, rather than political pragmatism.

In the Polish case, for example, Russia is often presented as a threat to the country's self-preservation. In an interview with Deutsche Welle, Poland's former foreign minister Radosław Sikorski states that "Russia is the only conceivable existential threat to Poland" (Deutsche Welle 2018). A similar rhetoric is adopted in the Baltic states, for instance, when Lithuania's former defence minister Raimundas Karoblis likewise refers to Russia as an "existential threat" (Wemer 2019). This framing of Russia as a radical security threat, although historically understandable, often results in either emotion-fuelled policies or inertia towards Russia, when – instead – the EU should pursue a pragmatic doctrine.

At the other end of the spectrum is the tendency to underestimate Russia as an aggressor. In a 2016 statement, for example, France's former president François Hollande argues that "for France, Russia is not an adversary, not a threat [...] Russia is a partner which, it is true, and we have seen that in Ukraine, may sometimes use force which we have condemned when it annexed Crimea" (RadioFreeEurope 2016). Meanwhile Italy's former prime minister Giuseppe Conte likewise states that he sees Russia not as "a military threat or enemy [...]" but as a potential partner" (Henley 2018).

A similarly minimising stance is sometimes adopted in policy circles. Political scientist Pavel K. Baev, for example, describes Putin's Russia as a country in decline, and he argues that even Moscow itself "realizes that the military balance [in the Baltic theatre] is ultimately not in its favor" (Baev 2015). Similarly, British military historian Sir Lawrence Freedman writes that Russia's great power status has been highly overrated, and he argues that Russia "would struggle to cope with a multi-front campaign or a prolonged occupation of a substantial hostile population" (Freedman 2014). Although these analyses provide an apt description of Russia's dwindling military-economic position, they miss an important point: even though Russia might be trapped in a downward spiral economically, it is still capable of acting as a *disruptor* in the international sphere.

An effective EU strategy towards Russia should therefore be based on a balanced threat assessment – one that acknowledges Russia's abilities to intervene in EU politics, while avoiding the paralysis caused by framing Russia as an existential threat. Ultimately, we should see Russia for what it is: a country too weak to determine our political course of action, but strong enough to become a problem (one need only look at Europe's energy dependency on Russia). This – in itself – makes it important to determine key areas of interest through which the EU can engage with the Russian Federation in a selective yet constructive manner.

### Policy recommendations: EU areas of interest

A first step towards selective engagement was taken in 2016 with the publication of the EU's five guiding principles, which form the foundation of the EU's policy towards Russia. In this document, EU foreign ministers and the EU's former high representative Federica Mogherini committed to "engage selectively with Russia on a range of foreign-policy issues, among them cooperation in the Middle East, counterterrorism and climate change", while – at the same

time – “insisting on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements” (European Parliament 2016). The document furthermore proposes to raise the EU’s resilience to Russian threats, including EU energy dependency, hybrid warfare, and disinformation; to pursue closer relations with countries in the EU’s eastern neighbourhood and central Asia; and to increase people-to-people contacts and support for Russian civil society. Taking these guiding principles as a starting point, the paragraphs that follow below propose a number of potential policy initiatives.

### *Arctic cooperation and environmental action*

First, the Arctic is likely to grow into one of the main theatres in which the EU engages with Russia in the future. Since 2014 the Russian leadership has steadily been increasing its military presence in the region. More recently, this process of militarisation has culminated in a long-term Arctic strategy through which Putin has committed to an even stronger military build-up (Russian Federal Government 2020). In light of this new Arctic strategy pursued by Russia, a recent report by the European Parliament’s committee on foreign affairs argues that “the EU will need to address hard and soft security issues within existing functional, regional and global frameworks and continue engaging in dialogue and confidence-building measures with Russia” (Dolata 2020).

Notwithstanding Russia’s increasingly combative positioning in the Arctic region, the European Union should refrain from fighting fire with fire. Instead, acting with magnanimity, the EU should make an effort to break the cycle of increased politicisation and militarisation. Otherwise, the EU would only enable Russia in turning the Arctic into a new theatre in which it can posture itself against an ‘antagonising’ West. Presenting the Arctic as a zone of mutual interest, rather than a potential domain for military strife, the EU should make a strategic effort to stop the Russian-led process of militarisation – not by blunt force or increased military presence in return, but through confidence-building measures and practical cooperation.

A primary outlet for EU-Russian cooperation in the Arctic is the fight against climate change. Through the Northern Dimension Policy framework, the EU and Russia (in cooperation with Norway and Iceland) have established practical and mutually beneficial forms of cooperation, particularly in the field of environmental action (eg, the reduction of nuclear waste, the protection of the marine environment, and the conservation of the Arctic ecosystem) (European External Action Service 2006). More ambitiously, the EU could push for a cooperation framework that includes the active participation of a wider ring of Arctic stakeholders; for example, the non-EU countries that currently hold observer status in the Arctic Council – Japan, China, India, Korea, Singapore, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Such a transnational framework would transcend an East-West divide in the Arctic, pursuing a truly transnational partnership between a broad range of actors. In short, rather than partaking in a normative competition with Russia, the EU should focus on the positive inclusion of other states in and beyond the Arctic.

### *People-to-people contact and education*

Second, although the European Union lacks the power to incite outright regime change in Russia, it does have the ability to reach *individual people*. With this in mind, the EU could pursue a two-pronged strategy in the field of people-to-people contact. On the one hand, the European Union could actively engage with the Russian diaspora that currently lives on its

territory. On the other hand, the EU could aim to reach a more progressive generation of millennials that currently lives in the Russian Federation.

Russian diaspora communities living on EU territory constitute a huge untapped potential in the field of people-to-people contact. Germany, for example, currently counts 260,395 inhabitants holding Russian citizenship (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2020). Estonia and Latvia have even more substantial Russian diaspora communities, which make up approximately a quarter of these countries' populations (RV0222U; Demography 2020). Although – in absolute numbers – these groups account for only a small percentage of the European community, their strategic potential should not be underestimated. Moscow, moreover, has long recognised the strategic position of these constituencies, pursuing a plethora of policies to instrumentalise these so-called “compatriots living abroad” (Pigman 2019). Similarly, the EU should start treating these diaspora communities as an important soft-power target group that can be pivotal in improving perceptions of the EU among the broader Russian population.

Additionally, the EU should focus its attention on a more progressive generation of millennials that is currently living in Russia. Conducting a survey across 15 regional capitals in the Russian Federation, a 2018 report by the German research centre ZOiS demonstrates that – compared to the overall population – Russian urban millennials hold substantially more critical views of the regime: 56% of the respondents believe that the Russian government should provide higher living standards, while 14% want the government to adopt anti-corruption reforms (Krawatzek and Sasse 2018). The report furthermore shows that Russian urban millennials – particularly those from higher socio-economic backgrounds – are overwhelmingly supportive of liberal values, such as the freedom of speech, non-discrimination, and equal opportunities. Although the survey also demonstrates that actual political engagement amongst these millennial constituencies is low, their attitudes are likely to provide the basis for a more progressive political force in the long term.<sup>1</sup>

The EU should instrumentalise this wave of generational change in Russia by inviting a new cohort of Russian citizens to spend its formative years studying and working in EU member states. This requires the EU to increase the visibility of existing frameworks – such as the Erasmus+ programme – in Russia, as well as to create new avenues of cross-country exchange in the fields of education, civil society, and entrepreneurship.

## **Conclusion**

The first half of this paper explored two separate but interconnected developments in Russian foreign policy discourse under the Putin regime. First, it explored shifts in Russia's attitude towards the European Union. This part of the analysis demonstrated that although Russia's governing elite initially declared the adoption of a variety of EU norms, Putin's second term (2004 – 2008) presents a shift in Russia's approach towards the EU's normative agenda. Where Russian foreign policy actors originally assessed the EU as an imperfect but *resilient* union, this narrative has been gradually substituted by a largely critical rhetoric. In this critical rhetoric, the EU is framed as a 'cautionary tale'. This overwhelmingly negative assessment of

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<sup>1</sup> See also Volkov, D. and Snegovaya, M. (2015) 'Protestnyj potencial rossijskoj molodeži', *Vedomosti*, 20 January ([www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2015/01/20/protestnyj-potencial-molodezhi](http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2015/01/20/protestnyj-potencial-molodezhi)); Snegovaya, M. (2018) 'Putin's New Generation: Will Russia's "Digital Natives" Change Their Country's Future?', Center for European Policy Analysis, 5 April (<https://cepa.org/putins-new-generation/>).

the European Union aligns with the emergence of various anti-liberal tropes of 'the West' in Russian political discourse. Presenting the EU as suffering from economic, political, and moral crises, the Russian leadership starts to counterpose a morally depraved Europe to a strong and virtuous Russia.

The paper then explored how these shifts in Russia's assessment of the European Union align with the pursuit of Russia's own integration project in the 'Eurasian' sphere. Here, the discursive analysis demonstrated the ways in which Russian political actors frame Eurasian integration as a necessary response to Russia's deteriorating relations with 'the West'. Moreover, this section explored the rise of a civilisational discourse in contemporary Russian foreign policy. With the publication of the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, the Russian leadership first introduced a 'civilisational dimension' to its external policies. While Russia initially pursued a humble integration-project based on economic cooperation between the '*troika*' states, it has gradually broadened its interests eastwards to incorporate non-post-Soviet partners, such as China, in the Eurasian sphere. Through the so-called Comprehensive Eurasian Partnership, Russian political actors increasingly present the strengthening of Sino-Russian relations as a necessary step to challenge a Western hegemony in the international sphere.

Additionally, this part of the analysis demonstrated the ways in which the Russian leadership has gradually changed the topical scope of the Eurasian project – from an economic collaboration to a decidedly 'civilisational' alliance. Through this discourse, the paper argued, Russian foreign policy actors increasingly point towards the existence of a distinctly Russian-Eurasian way of conducting international politics.

Taking these shifts in Russia's positioning towards the European Union into account, the second half of the paper explored potential fields of selective yet constructive engagement with Russia, as well as opportunities in the field of people-to-people contact. Here, the paper argued that although EU-Russian relations are often discussed in terms of a normative rivalry, conflicting normative agendas do not necessarily inhibit mutually beneficial cooperation. In this section, three suggestions were made for a more effective Russia doctrine: (i) a productive policy should refrain from treating dialogue as a reward and – instead – use it as a necessary tool to improve relations with the Russian Federation; (ii) it should consist of a more ambitious and strategic vision towards Russia – one that goes beyond the limited five guiding principles; and (iii) it should be based on a realistic threat assessment – one that acknowledges Russia's ability to act as a disruptor, while avoiding the inertia caused by framing Russia as an existential threat. This would require the EU to first come to terms with the widely diverging views held by various EU member states towards its eastern neighbour.

Finally, the paper highlighted two separate areas of interest in which the EU could take swift action to secure a stronger and more productive position vis-à-vis Russia. First, the EU should push for further practical cooperation with Russia in the Arctic region. Rather than being swept up in a process of militarisation, the Arctic could be turned into a zone of mutual interest, particularly when it comes to environmental action. Although the EU and Russia have established some practical fields of cooperation within the framework of the Northern Dimension Policy, the EU should push for more ambitious forms of cooperation between a wider ring of Arctic stakeholders. Second, the paper argued that the EU should pursue a two-pronged strategy in the field of people-to-people contact. On the one hand, the EU should treat Russian diaspora communities as an important soft-power target group that could be decisive in improving perceptions of the EU among the wider Russian population. On the

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other hand, the EU should reach out to a more progressive generation of Russian millennials. This requires the EU to increase the visibility of existing frameworks for cross-country exchange, such as the Erasmus+ programme, as well as to create new forms of exchange in the fields of education, civil society, and entrepreneurship.

To conclude – with the rise of a civilisational discourse in Russian foreign policy, the Russian leadership has increasingly pushed for a normative rivalry with the European Union. The success of this venture largely depends on the EU's response to it. Will the European Union allow Russia to position itself as a normative competitor in and beyond the shared neighbourhood? Or will the EU push Russia towards a pragmatic partnership?

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