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### EU-Russia Interdependence and Common Security Challenges

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In the 21st century the main arena of disagreement between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation has shifted eastwards to the Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The latter, due to its peripheral location, has gradually gained strategic significance for the global geopolitical actors, as a part of the Black Sea–Caspian energy region and as a natural corridor connecting Europe and Central Asia. The Caucasus is also a border crossing of Islam and Christianity, and the entrance gate of superpowers to Central Asia, as well as the only communication road to the world of Turkic countries, up to the Chinese border. Today the world is facing the phenomenon of Samuel Huntington, defined as “The clash of Civilizations of the West and Islam” (Huntington, 1993). It is a common issue for both the Western powers, the EU and the United States, and its rival, the Russian Federation. Thus, among the common challenges that interconnect Europe and Russia are energy issues, security questions and the competition policy in the shared neighborhood for their political and economic dominance; and the key challenge is how to overcome the new divides in the short term, not only by mending currently strained relations with Russia, but also by changing EU relations with other post-Soviet states.

The increasing interest of the EU in the shared neighborhood with the Russian Federation, expressed through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) project within its framework, were viewed by Russia as an attempt to diminish its position in the post-Soviet space and especially in the South Caucasus region, which is considered by Russia as an integral part of the Caucasus region.

Interestingly, relations with the European Union are considered as a key issue in Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept. The latter aims to create a stable and democratic system of European security and cooperation, aspiring to a long-term partnership with the EU.



Nevertheless, the year 2008 and the Russian-Georgian war had a negative impact on Russia-EU relations and, furthermore, the subsequent Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea worsened them even more deeply, announcing “the end of the Ostpolitik.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Ostpolitik is a term that was coined to describe West Germany’s cooperative approach to the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries, initiated by Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1969. As formulated by Brandt’s political secretary, Egon Bahr, the key idea of the ‘new eastern policy’ was to achieve positive ‘change through rapprochement’ (*Wandel durch Annäherung*). In the Cold War context, the primary example of Ostpolitik was West Germany’s willingness to engage with the Soviet Union through energy cooperation including gas supply, but also pipeline and nuclear projects.” See: Tuomas Forsberg,

However, the EU's dependence on Russian energy, the recent military escalation in Syria, terrorist acts in Paris, the terror act that downed the Russian A321 plane over the Sinai in Egypt, the shoot down of the Russian Su-24 jet by Turkey, a "terrorist incident" in London tube, the horrific scale of the attacks on women in German cities on a New Year's eve, are all new ground for rethinking and reviewing the EU-Russia diplomacy. The downing of a Russian airliner in October 2015 was the latest in a long history of terrorist attacks on Russian citizens.

Thus, Russia shares a concern with this threat with its European neighbors. With Europeans playing an increasingly important role in Syria and the wider region, dialogue may bring more results than ignoring Europe's role. It is in the interests of both sides, the European Union and the Russian Federation in moving forward, finding and forming a common space of security and cooperation.

In an October report 2015 of the Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, the authors<sup>2</sup> envisage three options for the EU in dealing with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU):

1. "Full Engagement," which is based on a new "strategic partnership" between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union, which is unrealistic in the present circumstances, as it would imply acceptance of Russia's predominance in its own orbit and its conceived rights to act on behalf of the Eurasian Union as a whole.

2. "Tentative Compatibility," This strategy would enable Eastern Neighborhood partner countries to keep their options open as much as possible towards both the EU and Russia: no "choosing, no losing." It would seek to find a formulae under which those countries could have an Association Agreement (DCFTA) and still combine that with participating in an Eastern CIS Free Trade (FTA), therefore, preserving their multi-vector policies.

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"From Ostpolitik to "frostpolitik"? Merkel, Putin and German foreign policy towards Russia," Chatham House, Vol. 92, N1, January, 2016, p. 1.  
[www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/ia/INTA92\\_1\\_02\\_Forsberg.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/ia/INTA92_1_02_Forsberg.pdf) (accessed on 10 February 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Tony Van der Toght, Francesco S. Montesano, Jaroslav Kozak (eds.), "From Competition to Compatibility: Striking a Eurasian balance in EU-Russia relations," Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, October 2015.  
[www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Eurasian\\_Union\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Eurasian_Union_Report_FINAL.pdf) (accessed on 28 January 2016).

3. "Competing Unions," This strategy would stipulate that the EU confront Russia geopolitically head-on and try to "lock" Eastern partner countries as soon as possible into European and transatlantic institutionalized frameworks. It would also imply leaving the former strategy of giving priority to relations with Russia firmly behind and replacing it with an "Eastern Partnership first strategy." In the short run, this strategy is unrealistic, as the EU is unwilling to take on that burden and unable to wage such a geopolitical battle with Russia in light of its own internal weaknesses and the significant interests of many of its member states in their own bilateral relations with Russia.

In the framework of the current geopolitical variations, the geostrategic and geo-economics importance of the South Caucasus countries, and their role as a key transit route for the export of hydrocarbons from the landlocked Caspian Sea region are greatly increasing. This importance is conditioned by the great interest of the European Union in Caspian energy, aiming at minimizing its dependence on Russian energy. However, the remaining obstacle connecting the EU with Caspian energy is political instability in the South Caucasus and, mainly, the dispute around the Nagorno-Karabakh region between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

During the last two years, the tension in the border zone not only between the unrecognized republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, but also between Armenia and Azerbaijan was militarily escalated. "For the first time since the ceasefire in 1994, Azerbaijani forces deployed a battle tank in an assault on December 9, 2015."<sup>3</sup> This "*neither-war-nor-peace-situation*" is only beneficial for Russia, providing it with effective leverage over both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In fact, the military solution of the conflict is excluded, due to the fact that Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline runs just 15 km to the north of Nagorno-Karabakh, and although it is buried, any renewal of conflict in the region will threaten the pipeline and, therefore, have an impact on global crude prices and threaten the security of supply. "Azerbaijan is no way ready for a new war, but the escalation can be out of control, thus the risk of a war bias is greater than ever.

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<sup>3</sup> "Russia's Armenia reinforcement may destabilize region," *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief*, 14 December 2015. [www.oxan.com/display.aspx?ItemID=DB207286](http://www.oxan.com/display.aspx?ItemID=DB207286) (accessed on 27 January 2016).

Consequently, in 2016, the primary role of the mediators and conflicting sides is to continue the diplomatic meetings, prevent the risk of the accidental war and restrict the military actions.”<sup>4</sup>

There are new shifts in regional geopolitics conditioned by Iran's nuclear deal with the international powers. Firstly, it is only in the benefit of Armenia that Iran is coming to the international arena and regional geopolitics, as the country can offer an alternative route for Iran to export its goods and energy. Secondly, there was an unexpected turn in Georgian policy in September 2015, when the Georgian Government started secret negotiations with Russia over the expansion of Gazprom's share of the Georgian energy market, which was criticized by Georgian society.

Along with these Tbilisi-Moscow negotiations, there was also a quadrilateral meeting between Armenian, Georgian, Russian and Iranian officials, who signed a cooperation memorandum for an expanded electricity transmission system in December 2015.

The latter can strengthen Armenia's position in the region, which has been economically isolated and lost its regional-geopolitical importance because of the ethno-political conflict with Azerbaijan and the politico-historical issues such as the Armenian Genocide and the “Armenian Question” with Turkey.

Nonetheless, the main energy provider in the region remains Azerbaijan, which has neither pro-European, nor pro-Russian politics. Its foreign policy priority centers on the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic, using its natural resources as a tool for manipulation in international relations and politics with Russia and the EU, which is interested in Caspian hydrocarbons and energy.

Summarizing the main points, it is clear that:

1.) Russian policy in the EU's shared neighborhood and the South Caucasus region are a “crossword” for the European Union to solve its energy dependence on Russia, and for Russia, to overcome the economic crisis and the backlash from the sanctions.

2.) The regional actors, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, unfortunately, are politically and economically vulnerable, and the solution should come from “inside,” namely, the domestic reform policy and the rule of law.”

3) Common security challenges and terror attacks threatening East and West, Europe and Russia in 2016 may become a platform to rethink EU-Russia relations, build a relationship in the fight against terrorism, organized crime and “engaging Russia in strengthening stability on the European continent, notably in regions adjacent to EU and Russian borders.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ռիչարդ Կիրակոսյան, “Մենք չհայտարարված պատերազմի վճարում ենք” Առաջին լրատվական, 31 Դեկտեմբեր. [www.1in.am/1807648.html](http://www.1in.am/1807648.html) (accessed on 31 January 2016).

<sup>5</sup> European Union External Action Service (EEAS), “EU Relations with Russia,” [http://eeas.europa.eu/russia/about/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/russia/about/index_en.htm) (accessed on 31 January 2016).