

## Foreword: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Russia and Europe are, like two sides of the same coin, completely different yet ideally matching. Their differences are rooted in centuries of latent enmity and a fundamental lack of mutual understanding of such basic notions as justice and law. Their unique compatibility is ensured by the fact that they were melted from the same metal in one sociopolitical furnace of the feudal “big Europe” of the ninth to thirteenth centuries. It is that same metal – deep, yet often unconscious kinship, common cultural and civilizational roots – that, even in times of difficult diplomatic relations, leaves opportunity for rapprochement of the highest quality. As of now, however, Russia and Europe are unprepared to grasp this opportunity.

In recent years, the slow but steady decline of European power on the world stage and the underlying crisis in relations between Russia and its primary economic partner, the European Union, have become common topics of both Russian and European analysis. The author of this foreword is no exception. Times, however, do change. The new historical reality, sometimes bloody and tragic, proves that Russia and Europe are inevitable and mutually indispensable partners. Especially now, when peace in Eurasia is in the balance.

Over the last 23 years relations have been through ups and downs. It is important to realize that Russia and Europe have not arrived at this point overnight. On a practical level, the opportunities to create a united community of two principle components of modern Europe – Russia and the EU – and to ensure Russia’s entry into Euro-Atlantic politico-military space on equal footing have been missed at least twice (in 1991–1994 and in the early 2000s). Nonetheless, the demonstration by both parties of political will to create such community could permit the other European countries to join it, creating a vast area of common humanistic, economic and energy interests, coordinated foreign and security policy, and a strategy regarding the Shared Neighbourhood.

In 1991–1994, Russia, now free from communism, with the reformist wing of the political elite in power, was ready to integrate with Europe and the West even as a junior partner. At the turn of the century, in the beginning of Vladimir Putin’s first presidential term, Moscow once again made a bid for a large-scale rapprochement with the EU, this time, however, on equal footing. The West hesitantly refused these first opportunities, deciding to confine itself to integrating only the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Thus began the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and, subsequently, the EU. Russia was treated politely as a defeated country and was offered an agenda of converting to conform to a European image and likeness, rather than the status of ally. However, Moscow did not consider itself defeated. It voluntarily decided to abandon confrontation. And this contradiction has formed a foundation for many subsequent difficulties.

The attempts at rapprochement made in the beginning of the 21st century had no clear common goal and were thus doomed to fail. Europe itself, crawling into a period of deep internal crisis and transformation, had neither the strength nor desire to engage in rapprochement with Russia. In the absence of strategic imagination, narrow and short-term interests prevailed – the outstretched hand hung in mid air. Many in Europe hoped to preserve the “master-slave” model of relations with Moscow, established in the 1990s, not willing to consider a joint approach to designing rules of coexistence with Russia (and not unilateral rules, based on the principles of the EU and NATO). Meanwhile, Russia, which began to restore its strategic and socioeconomic potential, categorically rejected this model, sometimes acting recklessly and overly harsh. At this point, the fundamental differences between the parties were exacerbated by

subjective factors – substantial degrees of arrogance, unwillingness to compromise and intention to have one's way at all costs.

Now, in 2014, Russia and Europe wander in the increasing chaos of the modern world, submerged in the darkness of their own fears, preconceptions and egoistic behaviour. In recent years, engagement between them has been reduced to attempts to gain the maximum at the expense of the partner under the guise of strategic partnership. The zero-sum game, in which one party's gain inevitably means the other's loss, became the ruling principle of Russian-European relations. Europe seeks salvation beyond the ocean. Russia is increasingly confident in its Asian aspirations, establishing its own alternative to the EU in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union, which, with every passing month, becomes more and more distinct. The danger appears that, in the mid term, deep and broad commercial and economic ties will no longer serve as a safety net for international relations.

For this very reason the time is right to discuss Europe seriously. Not the Europe we perceive, however, but the real one, institutionally embodied in the European Union, which in its turn is searching for new pathways into the future and new means to enhance its competitiveness. A new start in relations between Russia and the European Union could be part of the agenda.

The author of this foreword, HSE and MGIMO University professor Oleg Barabanov, CCEIS Junior Research Fellow Anastasia Likhacheva and a group of brilliant students from the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs obviously could not cover all the aspects of such a multifaceted topic in one volume. However, in this issue of the International Organisations Research Journal, we have attempted to study at least some of these aspects on both the theoretical and practical levels: the issues pertaining to the internal transformation of European Union and its most important, institutional element; the theoretical aspects of a systems analysis of Russia – EU relations and the impact of cultural factors and national decision-making mechanisms on them; the interaction between these parties in troubled regions, such as Central Asia; and, finally, competition in the European part of the Post-Soviet space. The results of this work are presented here to the esteemed readers.

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