The EU, Russia and the Quest for a New European Security Bargain

Clingendael Report

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Cover photo: Current High Representative of the European Union for Foreign and Security Affairs Federica Mogherini visits Russian president Vladimir Putin in July 2014 (then in the position of Italian Foreign Minister).
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About the author

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Summary

This Clingendael Report argues that the European Union (EU) should construct a working relationship with Russia in order to deal with existing global security matters. The November 2015 Paris terror attacks underline the necessity of political and military cooperation with Russia to make common cause against jihadism and the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The EU should ensure that its Association Agreement with Ukraine (signed but not yet ratified) will be compatible with Kiev's commitments of free trade with Russia. The Association Agreement may need to be amended to take into account Russian (and arguably also Ukrainian) interests, both economic and political. Western political leaders should also clarify that Ukraine is unlikely to join the EU (and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) anytime soon. The EU should unequivocally separate Russia's two cardinal sins (annexation of Crimea and support for anti-government rebels in eastern Ukraine). Solving the crisis in eastern Ukraine is the EU's first priority and Brussels should focus all its diplomatic energy on this issue. The Donbass region should be pacified and stabilized, preferably under a United Nations Interim Administration, as was recently the case in Kosovo. The EU should also initiate a high-level platform to discuss prospects to modify Europe's security architecture. Finally, the EU should start an organized conversation with Russia about European norms and values.

Map 1 Map of Ukraine

Source: Wikimedia Commons/NordNordWest

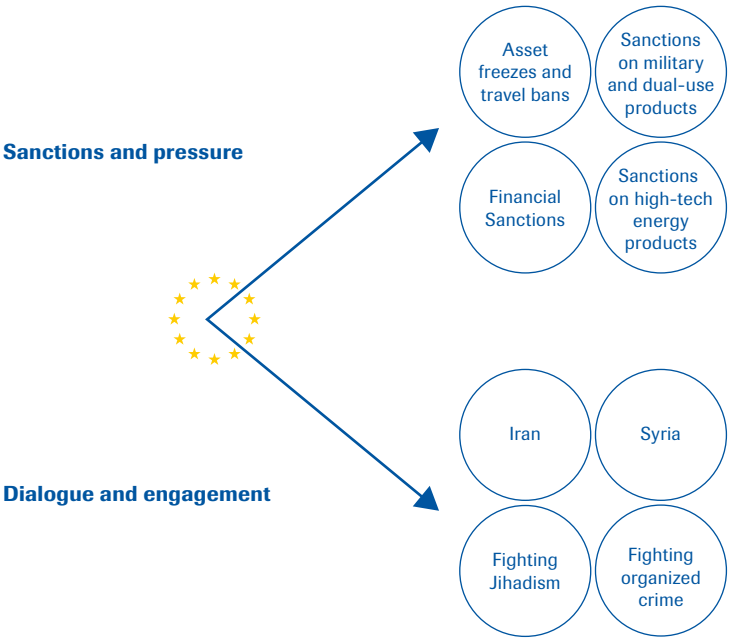
Introduction

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea (in March 2014) and its on-going support for anti-government rebels in eastern Ukraine, relations with the EU have deteriorated. The EU no longer considers Russia a strategic partner and has made it clear that its sanctions policy will remain in place until Russia is prepared to recognize the integrity and sovereignty of its neighbours. In the meantime, eastern Ukraine's Donbass region is slowly turning into a 'frozen conflict', and the possibility of resolving the annexation of Crimea is remote. It is in the EU's interest to ensure that the *status quo* in the region will not turn into a *fait accompli*. This is a serious risk, since the Russian government has become trapped in its own nationalist rhetoric, making the return of Crimea to Ukraine unacceptable and non-negotiable. In turn, the EU is reluctant to adopt a 'back to business as usual' approach, since caving to Russia's President Putin would undermine the EU's standing as a normative power that is keen to uphold European norms and values, as well as international law.

The EU has shocked President Putin by maintaining remarkable unity in its sanctions policy, which includes restrictions and bans in three key areas: finance; military and dual-use products; as well as high-tech energy exports. Although the economic impact of Western sanctions may well be significant, it remains uncertain whether they will alter Russia's stance on eastern Ukraine, let alone its calculations on Crimea. The unintended consequences of the EU's sanctions policy have also become clear, since Russia is now seeking closer (trade, political and military) ties with China and the Gulf States.[1] Russia also makes the most of EU sanctions to strengthen its official narrative that 'the West' is openly antagonistic and engaged in a new Great Power (or even civilizational) 'war', making it easier for President Putin to rally the Russian people around the flag.

1 Alexander Gabuev, 'A "Soft Alliance"? Russia–China Relations after the Ukraine Crisis', *ECFR Policy Brief* (February 2015); and Eduard Steiner, 'Der Handschlag, Der Putins Riskanten Plan Besiegelt', *Die Welt* (13 July 2015).

Figure 1 The EU's two-pronged approach towards Russia



Recognizing the need to construct a working relationship with Russia, the EU follows a two-pronged approach of sanctions and pressure, combined with dialogue and engagement (see figure 1). This classical dual-track strategy is based on a reappraisal of the EU's interests and a more sober understanding of Russia's role in European security. The EU (as well as the United States) maintains contact with Russia on a wide range of issues, from dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions and the war in Syria, to fighting jihadism and organized crime. Arguably, the Paris terror attacks have radically changed the EU's security agenda. Several EU member states have declared themselves 'at war' with the Islamic State, and President Putin has offered himself as a viable and even indispensable partner in what seems to be becoming a common strategic cause. A deal will probably have to be made with Russia involving Moscow's cooperation in Syria in return for some form of recognition of Russia's interests in Ukraine (including Crimea).[2] Details and the political ramifications of this 'deal' remain vague, but certainly merit serious discussion. However, the EU's strategy towards Russia remains unclear, and suggestions for how to construct a new basis for a long-term relationship between Brussels and Moscow are scarce and often unpolished.

2 Neil Buckley, 'Syria Surge Strengthens Putin's Hand in Middle East – and in Ukraine', *Financial Times* (25 September 2015).

In a world of global power shifts, the EU has to adopt a more geostrategic approach.

This Clingendael Report takes an unapologetic Realist view of the EU–Russia relationship. It recognizes that in a world of global power shifts, the EU has to adopt a more geostrategic approach. This implies that the EU and the Netherlands in particular have to overcome the drama of the downing of flight MH17 (in July 2014) which killed 298 people; resentment should take a back-seat to finding practical solutions to pressing problems, like fighting jihadism and the Islamic State (in Syria and beyond). After offering a concise overview of the EU's options *vis-à-vis* Russia, this Report argues that the EU should ensure that its Association Agreement with Ukraine (signed but not yet ratified) will be compatible with Kiev's commitments of free trade with Russia. It may also mean that this Association Agreement needs to be amended to take into account Russian (and arguably also Ukrainian) interests, both economic and political. Western political leaders should also clarify that Ukraine is unlikely to join the EU (and NATO) any time soon. The EU should also ensure that Russia's two cardinal sins (that is, the annexation of Crimea and support for anti-government rebels in eastern Ukraine) can be accounted for, and ultimate absolved in two, separate processes. Solving the crisis in eastern Ukraine is the EU's first priority and Brussels should focus all of its diplomatic energy on this. The Donbass region should be pacified and stabilized, preferably under a United Nations (UN) Interim Administration, as was recently the case in Kosovo. The EU should also initiate a high-level platform to discuss prospects to modify Europe's security architecture. Finally, the EU should start an organized conversation with Russia about European norms and values.

Taken together, this Clingendael Report's recommendations offer a realistic agenda to resuscitate the EU–Russia relationship, ensuring that the West is not sleepwalking into a Cold Peace, or even a renewed 'hot' conflict with Moscow. The EU may even benefit from this existential crisis on its own continent to make a shift towards strategic maturity, accepting Russia – and international politics in general – as it is, and not as Brussels' policy-makers desire it to be.

1 The EU's Russia Policy: A Critical Appraisal

EU policy towards Russia is based on the premise that President Putin is squarely to blame for Russia's aggressive and confrontational course of action, and hence for the potential destabilization of Europe. Some modest soul-searching has gone on in the classical debate on 'what to do' with today's Russia. For example, Stephen Sestanovich asks 'Could It Have Been Otherwise?', concluding that apart from the mistake of assigning Russia a lower priority on the West's foreign policy agenda (mainly because of the crises in the Middle East), no strategic errors were made; Carl Bildt (and many others) concur.[3] Richard Sakwa is among the few critical voices, claiming that the EU itself is the 'source of the conflict' and that the 'EU's ill-prepared advance into what was always recognized to be a contested neighbourhood [that is, Ukraine], provoked the gravest international crisis of our era'.[4] Sakwa's view is shared by Anton Bebler, who argues that '[h]igh representatives of the US and EU did a great disservice to Ukraine's integrity when they openly and uncritically supported […] one side in the internal conflict which included also armed Ukrainian ultranationalists and neo-fascists'.[5] This debate is highly relevant, since it draws attention to the active role of the EU in the Ukraine crisis and the lapses of judgement that have been made over the years. The criticism aired by scholars like Sakwa and Bebler is important to ensure that the EU remains critical of its own policies, thus avoiding a 'closing of the EU mind'.

As usual, Hanlon's razor applies to the EU, and one should 'never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity'. The EU's take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards Moscow, as well as its patronizing call for Russia to follow Europe's post-modern norms and values, should therefore benevolently be ascribed to Brussels' 'slightly Utopian' view of international affairs, 'full of wishy-washy good intentions',[6] rather than to concerted

3 Stephen Sestanovich, 'Could It Have Been Otherwise?', *The American Interest*, vol. 10, no. 5 (April 2015); and Carl Bildt, 'Russia, the European Union, and the Eastern Partnership', *ECFR Riga Series* (2015).

4 Richard Sakwa, 'The Death of Europe? Continental Fates after Ukraine', *International Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 3 (May 2015), p. 575.

5 Anton Bebler, 'Crimea and the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict', *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 1 (March 2015), p. 47.

6 These are the words of former British Ambassador to Russia, Sir Timothy Brenton, quoted in 'The EU and Russia: Before and Beyond the Crisis in Ukraine', *House of Lords, European Union Committee*, 6th Report of Session 2014–2015 (London), p. 23.

efforts to derail autocratic regimes through so-called 'colour revolutions'.[7] Lack of strategic thinking and analytical capability adequately explain how the EU has been 'sleepwalking' into a situation where a 'wider war in Europe suddenly seems possible'.[8]

Still, mistakes *have* been made by the EU, most notably during the crucial four months preceding Ukraine's Maidan revolution (in early 2014). Only when the final text of the EU's Association Agreement (AA) with Ukraine was published (in summer 2013) did Russia realize that this would shatter its dream to recreate a new 'post-Soviet economic space'. Although the Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU might still be compatible with the free-trade area between Russia and Ukraine, it would prohibit Kiev from joining a future Russian-dominated Eurasian Union Customs Union. As (former) European Commissioner Stefan Füle put it (in September 2013): 'You cannot at the same time lower your customs tariffs as per the DCFTA and increase them as a result of the Customs Union membership'.[9] During the crucial period from September–December 2013, Moscow proposed trilateral meetings of the EU, Ukraine and Russia to discuss the impact of the planned Association Agreement.

President Putin clearly laboured on this point in a speech in October 2014:

> *[I]n implementing Ukraine's association project, our partners would come to us with their goods and services through the back gate, so to speak, and we did not agree to this, nobody asked us about this. We had discussions on all topics related to Ukraine's association with the EU, persistent discussions, but I want to stress that this was done in an entirely civilized manner, indicating possible problems, showing the obvious reasoning and arguments. Nobody wanted to listen to us and nobody wanted to talk. They simply told us: this is none of your business, point, end of discussion. Instead of a comprehensive but – I stress – civilized dialogue, it all came down to a government overthrow; they plunged the country into chaos, into economic and social collapse, into a civil war with enormous casualties.*[10]

7 Ivan Krastev, 'Russian Mistakes and Western Misunderstandings', *Financial Times* (17 June 2015).

8 Bildt, 'Russia, the European Union, and the Eastern Partnership', p. 11.

9 Stefan Füle, 'Statement on the Pressure Exercised by Russia on Countries of the Eastern Partnership', *European Parliament Plenary* (11 September 2013).

10 Vladimir Putin, 'Putin's Speech at the Valdai Club', *Valdai Discussion Club* (25 October 2014).

Russia's request for such a 'civilized dialogue' was therefore brushed aside by Brussels, in the mistaken understanding that Russia was not a legitimate stakeholder in Ukraine's talks with the EU. After the crisis escalated and most of the damage had been done, the EU backtracked and a process of trilateral talks (including Russia) is now under way (see below). German Chancellor Angela Merkel even suggested that Kiev could find a working relationship with the Eurasian Union, since Russia remains by far Ukraine's largest trading partner.[11] However, the compatibility of Ukraine's AA/DCFTA and (free) trade with Russia remains an unresolved, highly relevant and sensitive issue (see below).

11 Valentina Pop and Andrew Rettman, 'Merkel: Ukraine Can Go to Eurasian Union', *EUObserver* (25 August 2014).

2 From Disappointment to Room for Manoeuvre

The EU and most EU member states are disillusioned by Russia, even to the point of feeling betrayed. Brussels always saw the EU–Russian strategic partnership as more than an economic relationship comprising the exchange of Russian energy for EU-made machinery. Instead, the EU's aim was to establish a process of normative rapprochement, based on openness, dialogue and modernization. The expected end-result was supposed to be a stable, satisfied and 'European' Russia that is truly deserving of the label 'strategic partner'. After more than a decade of highly institutionalized ties and biannual high-level summits, negotiations on a new EU–Russia Agreement were finally suspended; the last acrimonious meeting took place in Brussels on 28 January 2014.

Although the Ukraine crisis came as a surprise, the breakdown of EU–Russia ties had developed in slow motion, ever since the much-advertised Partnership for Modernization was launched at the 2010 Rostov Summit. The ambition of cooperation on a wide range of policy areas – from research and education to culture, and from human rights to energy governance – remained declarative. The return of Vladimir Putin (who began his third term as Russia's President in September 2011) implied the end of a more forward-looking model of modernization (under President Dmitry Medvedev). Instead, President Putin adopted a foreign policy based on Realism and even neo-revisionism, in the hope that a rekindled process of Eurasian integration would halt the encroachment of the EU and NATO into Russia's 'near abroad'. The EU's reluctance to liberalize its strict visa regime to include ordinary Russians (and not just businessmen, researchers and diplomats) proved a major bone of contention and 'has helped the authorities to portray the EU negatively inside Russia'.[12] Moscow also withdrew from the Partnership for Modernization's human rights dialogue, to the EU's dismay. In 2013, the EU–Russia 'strategic partnership' had already become a misnomer. In May 2015, the European Parliament officially pulled the plug by declaring that Russia 'can no longer be treated as, or considered, a "strategic partner"'.[13]

12 Arkady Moshes, 'The EU–Russian Strategic Partnership: A Patient in a Deplorable Condition', *German–Nordic–Baltic Forum* (September 2012), p. 5.

13 European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report on the State of EU–Russia Relations* (rapporteur: Gabrielius Landsbergis) (13 May 2015), p. 6.

Official EU policy (March 2015) is based on the premise that 'restrictive measures against the Russian Federation […] should be clearly linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements. […] The European Council does not recognize and continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation and will remain committed to fully implement its non-recognition policy'.[14] This unequivocal stance quickly became the mantra within all of the EU member states. Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders echoed this official statement in September 2015: 'Sanctions remain necessary while Russia refuses to implement the Minsk agreements to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine. There is also a separate set of sanctions for Crimea, which will remain in place as long as Russia continues its illegal annexation'.[15] This stands in stark contrast to President Putin's statement in March 2014 that 'Crimea is our common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability. And this strategic territory should be part of a strong and stable sovereignty, which today can only be Russian'.[16] On the future of Crimea, the EU and Russia are clearly at loggerheads. Policy-makers on both sides have formulated their positions in tough, uncompromising terms, making it hard to see room for flexibility and a diplomatic trajectory towards the 'middle ground'.

Figure 2 Crimea's strategic importance for Russia

Source: Wikimedia Commons

14 'European Council Conclusions on External Relations', European Council (19 March 2015).

15 Bert Koenders, 'Toespraak Minister Koenders Tijdens een Bijeenkomst over 40 Jaar Helsinki-Akkoorden' [Speech by Minister Koenders during a Meeting on 40 Years of the Helsinki Accords], De Balie (Amsterdam), (12 September 2015).

16 'Address by President of the Russian Federation', Kremlin (Moscow), 18 March 2014.

Although the EU celebrates its united front against Russia as a major achievement, its main challenge is recalibrating policy *vis-à-vis* Russia, opening up political room for manoeuvre.

The EU is not the only Western antagonist of Russia, but coordinates its policies with the United States, and to a lesser extent (within) NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Flexible configurations like the so-called 'Normandy Format' (comprising Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia) also play a role. Still, the EU has turned itself into the key player in the region, which means that the onus for finding a possible way out of the current dead-end street is put on Brussels. Although the EU celebrates its united front against Russia as a major achievement, its main challenge is recalibrating policy *vis-à-vis* Russia, opening up political room for manoeuvre.
For Russia, it will be easier to budge on eastern Ukraine than on Crimea, simply because its naval base in Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet remain crucial because of their size, location and infrastructure (see figure 2). Crimea gives Russia access to its naval base at Sevastopol, home to the Black Sea Fleet (BSF). Operating from Sevastopol, Russia has the ability to project power in and around the Black Sea and also provides the Russian Navy with access to the Mediterranean, and to the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Crimea also serves as headquarters for Russia's newly constituted Mediterranean Task Force, which has recently resumed permanent operations in the eastern Mediterranean, extending Russia's reach and enhancing its prestige in the region. The Mediterranean Task Force was recently used to deliver military equipment to Syria, to remove Syrian chemical weapons and to conduct anti-piracy operations near Somalia. Crimea is also home to the BSF 11th Coastal Defence Missile Brigade, and is part of a new system of advanced combat aircraft stationed at Crimea's Kacha and Gvardeisk air bases, which will significantly enhance Russia's air defence capabilities on its southern flank.[17]
Since Russia's official lease of Sevastopol (from Ukraine, running through 2042) was put into doubt by Ukraine's government in Kiev,[18] Moscow saw itself 'obliged' to take over the Crimean Peninsula, which it did in March 2014.

Many EU leaders argue that a 'prosperous, stable and democratic Ukraine is vital to Europe'.[19] What is more, the EU's self-styled role as guardian of 'European norms and values' makes it nigh impossible to water down its demands. So how can this Gordian knot be loosened and ultimately untied?

17 Paul N. Schwartz, 'Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia', *CSIS* (18 March 2014).

18 'New Ukraine Leadership Vows to Expel Russian Fleet From Crimea', *Novinite.com* (28 February 2014).

19 'Toespraak Minister Koenders Tijdens een Bijeenkomst over 40 Jaar Helsinki-Akkoorden'.

3 Time is Not on Our Side

The EU–Russia stalemate can only be broken if it serves the interests of all of the players involved, including the new, democratic Kiev government. The EU, Russia and Ukraine will all have to compromise; if not, eastern Ukraine will turn into a 'frozen conflict', Crimea will remain Russian, and European security will truly sleepwalk into a 'Cold Peace' (or worse). The EU's dual-track approach of sanctions and dialogue has worked reasonably well, and the EU's aim to harm the Kremlin and Russia's oligarchy is a measured success. Helped by the collapse of global crude oil prices, Russia has suffered from a haemorrhaging outflow of capital, falling credit ratings and a sinking rouble. In 2014, the rouble lost half of its value, forcing a drastic rise of interest rates and deflating Russia's self-confidence. The Russian government has implemented significant budget cuts (especially in the public sector), causing a drop in the average income of ordinary Russians for the first time this decade.

With two elections coming up in Russia (parliamentary elections in September 2016 and presidential elections in March 2018), the EU hopes that President Putin will ultimately decide to adopt a constructive attitude towards eastern Ukraine; as to Crimea, all bets are off. In the meantime, Western sanctions are becoming 'a form of collective punishment on the Russian people, threatening to reduce a significant proportion of the population to penury'.[20] Clearly, Moscow's tit-for-tat food import ban (including meat, fish, dairy products, fruit and vegetables) from the EU and other countries supporting Western sanctions further penalizes the Russian populace.[21] Apart from encouraging Russia's pivot to Asia (and China in particular), Western sanctions have probably strengthened public support for President Putin and harmed the EU's image among ordinary people. Although the Russian government may become vulnerable if it no longer delivers basic public goods, it is not at all clear that the alternative to President Putin will be more congenial. As Richard Sakwa argues, 'If there was to be "regime change" in Russia, all the polls indicate that this would be followed by a more authoritarian consolidation'.[22]

20 Richard Sakwa, 'Politics and International Affairs in Putin's Third Term', in Richard Sakwa, Mark Galeotti and Harley Balzer, *Putin's Third Term: Assessments amid Crisis* (Washington DC: Center on Global Interests, 2015), p. 12.

21 'Russia Adds Countries to Food Import Ban over Sanctions', *BBC News* (13 August 2015).

22 Sakwa, 'Politics and International Affairs in Putin's Third Term', p. 12.

The EU (and the West in general) has a clear, but rather rigid set of conditions that Russia has to fulfil before sanctions can be lifted. The Minsk Protocol stipulates Russia's role in stabilizing eastern Ukraine, and the EU's Crimea/Sevastopol sanctions call upon Moscow to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. These regimes are obviously closely linked, which raises the question of whether the EU is prepared to relax sanctions even if Russia's hold on Crimea lasts? Conversely, what options does the EU have if Russia remains uncooperative? And how can the EU ensure that, during this on-going European crisis, Russia will remain engaged on global security matters such as dealing with Syria and fighting jihadism and WMD (weapons of mass destruction) proliferation? In this complicated game of geopolitical poker, it is the EU (and hence the West in general) that will probably blink first. In September 2015, French President François Hollande argued that since progress had been made towards the implementation of the Minsk agreements (of February 2015), the EU should show flexibility: 'The process has moved forward. There has been progress in the last few weeks. The ceasefire has almost been respected'. If local elections and decentralization reforms are successful, Hollande argued, 'then I will ask for sanctions to be lifted'.[23] This French call for leniency towards Moscow will only grow louder after the recent Paris terror attacks, which underline the need to keep Russia on board to fight jihadism and the Islamic State (in Syria and beyond).

In this complicated game of political poker, it is the EU (and hence the West in general) that will probably blink first.

To complicate matters further, powerful economic lobbies within the EU continue to call for a more lenient approach to Russia, arguing (for example) that as many as 60,000 jobs could be lost because of the nearly 20 per cent drop in German exports to Russia.[24] Even more alarmist estimates indicate that sanctions on Russia may cost the EU €100 billion.[25] Theoretically, the high economic price that the EU pays for its Russia sanctions should signal the EU's sincerity and determination.[26] In reality, however, the damage done to European economies moderates the EU's posture, making it just a matter of time before the sanctions' regime will be undermined and gradually softened. Politically, the EU's united front may also prove more brittle than expected. In August 2015, the European

23 'Ukraine Conflict: France Hopes to End Russia Sanctions', *BBC News*, 7 September 2015. Hollande's exact words (in French) are revealing: France is 'pour une levée des sanctions qui touchent la Russie, *si la logique* des accords de Minsk était respectée' (emphasis added). Translation: France 'is for lifting sanctions on Russia *if the logic of* the Minsk agreements will be respected'. This choice of words clearly opens considerable room for manoeuvre for all parties involved, especially for the EU.

24 'German Exports to Russia Could Fall More in 2015 – Business Lobby', *Reuters* (23 January 2015).

25 Jörg Eigendorf, 'Russland-Krise Kostet Europa Bis Zu 100 Milliarden Euro', *Die Welt* (19 June 2015).

26 David Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

Parliament's Progressive Alliance of Socialist and Democrats (S&D) called for a 'new initiative for political dialogue in Europe', as well as the removal of some sanctions.[27] Center–right Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have also established a group called 'For New Dialogue with Russia', which is to visit Moscow in early 2016.[28]

EU policy towards Russia is therefore weighed down by numerous challenges and demands. Externally, global security issues require Moscow's cooperation, or at least a Russia that does not use its ample obstructive power. Internally, economic and political pressures mount, and will continue to nag at the EU's confidence and tenacity *vis-à-vis* Russia. Most importantly, moreover, time is not on the EU's side. The EU's gamble that mounting economic pressure on Russia will force the Kremlin's hand on eastern Ukraine and Crimea reveals just another triumph of hope over experience. For President Putin, eastern Ukraine and Crimea are so-called 'first order' national security priorities. Although EU leaders huff and puff that 'Ukraine's security is Europe's security' (and vice-versa), this is clearly half-hearted rhetoric. In the end, the EU's security and prosperity do not hinge on Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. If matters are not resolved within the next year or so, eastern Ukraine and Crimea will slide down the EU's overflowing policy agenda and become, at best, 'second order' priorities. Arguably, this process is already well under way, as the compromising words of French President Hollande (see above) seem to indicate.

This should not come as a surprise. The EU has neither been able to mollify Turkey's stance on Northern Cyprus (which it has occupied since 1974), nor to prevent (or end) Morocco's occupation of the Western Sahara (since 1976). The recent nuclear deal with Iran (after more than a decade of tough UN-backed sanctions) further indicates that the EU (and the West in general) will ultimately fold because of a mix of greed, impatience and disillusionment.[29] The Paris terror attacks have reshuffled the strategic cards between the EU and Russia. In an instant, Russia has turned from a quasi pariah state into a crucial, coveted player and even potential partner to address the EU's new top security priority: to fight, and win, the 'war' on jihadism, both in Syria and in Europe. As Russian political strategist Gleb Pavlosky has argued: 'The West may find it hard to discuss a degree of Russia's responsibility for what happened in Ukraine, or the legitimacy of its presence in Syria, at a moment when the [Islamic State] has reached all the way to the Eiffel Tower'.[30] European Council President Donald Tusk clearly recognized this new reality by suggesting that a 'common aim for us [that is, the EU]

27 Maïa de la Baume, 'MEPs Call for Thaw in EU–Russia Relations', *Politico.eu* (3 August 2015).

28 'EU Lawmaker Confirms Group "For New Dialogue with Russia" to Visit Moscow', *Sputniknews.com* (27 July 2015).

29 Frederick Kagan, 'Why They're Cheering in Tehran', *Wall Street Journal* (14 July 2015).

30 Vladimir Isachenkov and Josh Lederman, 'Narrowing Rift, US and Russia Entertain Cooperation in Syria', *The Washington Post* (18 November 2015).

should be coordinating actions against *Daesh* [the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State] and the cooperation between the United States and Russia is a crucial one for sure'.[31] Hence, the EU's window of opportunity to affect Russia's policies is already closing, and policy-makers in Brussels know it. Understandably (and more worryingly), the Kremlin knows this as well.

31 'US, Russia Cooperation Crucial to Defeat ISIS: EU Official', *ARA News* (15 November 2015).

4 The EU's Policy Toolbox

The EU has ruled out the use of military force in Ukraine, or against Russia. EU Council President Jean-Claude Juncker has made the case for a 'European army' (arguing that such a 'common European army would convey a clear message to Russia that we are serious about defending our European values'[32]), but this plan has been discounted by all EU member states (bar Germany). So what is left in the EU's policy toolbox? And how can (and should) the EU and its member states use the available tools to ratchet their policies up and down, depending on Russia's actions in the region?

Most of the EU's policy instruments are already in full swing as part of the impressive sanctions' package that was implemented immediately after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. This does not mean that all economic and financial ties are now abrogated, and the EU could certainly tighten up and intensify its economic sanctions on Russia. For example, the European Parliament has called upon EU member states to suspend bilateral cooperation with Russia in the defence sector.[33] Defence cooperation largely remains outside the EU's remit, but should be carefully coordinated at the EU level as well as with the United States and within NATO. The saga of France's botched deal to sell two Mistral helicopter carriers to Russia in August 2015 (worth US$ 978 million), indicates both the necessity and possibility of arriving at a consistent EU approach on military exports to Russia.[34] Major Western energy firms (including BP, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and others) have consistently moved ahead with major oil and gas projects in Russia. Most EU (and US) sanctions only affect individuals and ancillary companies, which has not halted big oil firms from cooperating with Russia, especially in the coveted Arctic region. Calls for more aggressive Western sanctions affecting the energy sector as a whole have come to naught, mainly because it would eliminate the East–West energy interdependence that has, arguably, kept a lid on the escalation of tensions.

The EU faces the familiar problem that when its sanctions do bite, they tend to hurt the wrong people, most notably ordinary Russians (rather than Putin's political entourage). Today, Western sanctions and Russia's subsequent ban on a wide range of Western goods are causing the cost of food and medicines to rise. Recent reports indicate that almost one million Russian HIV patients are affected by drugs' shortages and an

32 'Juncker Calls for EU Army, Says Would Deter Russia', *Reuters* (8 March 2015).

33 European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Report on the State of EU–Russia Relations*, p. 8.

34 Pierre Tran, 'Mistral Dispute with Russia Settled, France Eyes Exports', *Defense News* (9 August 2015). France decided to sell the Mistral carriers to Egypt instead in September 2015. They are expected to be delivered in March 2016.

ineffective Russian domestic substitution campaign.[35] As a result, public discontent is growing.[36] However, there are no indications that the cumulative effect of the West's economic sanctions is eroding Russian public support and/or is impelling oligarchs to apply pressure on the Kremlin to adopt a more accommodating stance.

EU sanctions are hardly the precision instrument that they are made out to be.

EU sanctions are therefore hardly the precision instrument that they are made out to be, and they rarely affect the right sectors and people within a politically relevant timeframe. The complete breakdown of EU–Russian negotiations on visa liberalization is a case in point (see above), as is the much-touted 'asset freeze and travel ban' regime, which affects 151 people and 37 entities within Russia. The United States' so-called Magnitzky List (named after the Russian whistleblower Sergei Magnitzky, who died in prison in 2009) inspired the EU to introduce this list of 'specially designed nationals' from Russia, but so far the United States has been tougher here, targeting oligarchs who are close to President Putin. The EU's list of 'banned Russians' mostly comprises rather unknown figures in local (Crimean) politics, as well as middle-ranking military officers. The EU could 'ratchet up' its sanctions by including Putin's inner circle on the targeted persons' list. However, given that Russia has imposed an entry ban on 89 European political and military leaders (May 2015), the EU is reluctant to escalate matters further. A small group of MEPs now calls for the EU to remove Russian parliamentarians from the sanctions' list, arguing that it hampers dialogue and *de facto* blocks the EU–Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC), which has been 'on hold' since the Ukraine conflict erupted in 2014.

Aware that EU sanctions and restricted visa policies affect ordinary Russians negatively, the European Council has initiated an Action Plan comprising a wide array of projects aimed at countering Russian propaganda and misinformation. Under the banner of Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy, a start-up team ('East StratCom Team') works together with other EU institutions and EU member states to 'clearly communicate the universal values that the EU promotes', as well as the 'development of positive and effective messages regarding EU policies towards the region'.[37] The East StratCom Team will monitor Russian media and develop 'communication products', as well as media campaigns, explaining EU policies in the region. In future, this may also include the production of entertainment and documentary programmes, although plans for funding

35 Maxim Sraj, 'Ousted! How Sanctions against Russia are Expected to Affect Pharma Investments', *STEMPharma* (June 2014); and Daria Litvinova, 'Russia's HIV Patients Struggle to Get Treatment', *The Moscow Times* (16 September 2015).

36 Harley Balzer, 'Will Russia Waste Another Crisis?', in Sakwa *et al.*, *Putin's Third Term*, p. 32.

37 European Council, 'Action Plan on Strategic Communication' (June 2015).

a Russian-language television channel have not been realized.[38] This is all part of the EU's new regional communication programme 'OPEN Neighbourhood', which is aimed at developing effective networks of communication.

For the EU, the main prize is to reach the Russian populace and to counter President Putin's narrative of an unfriendly, aggressive EU that is engaged in a 'civilization war' against traditional Russian values and interests. The OPEN Neighbourhood programme specifically aims to support independent Russian-language media, ensuring that Moscow's dominant voice in the region does not go unchallenged. The EU also aims to increase people-to-people contacts (involving journalists, scientists, human rights groups and artists), based on the assumption that '[t]hese circles still foster critical minds and that is why many in these fields find themselves at loggerheads with increasingly repressive government authorities. They are in a difficult situation and deserve our support'.[39] The Dutch government has also made it easier for Russian lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people to apply for asylum in the Netherlands, indicating that Russia's climate of homophobia is setting the country apart from Europe's societal mainstream.[40]

Opening the EU's doors to students, scientists and artists is a useful and timely, but also customary and unimaginative, course of action. Little can be expected from exchange programmes and academic cooperation, beyond showing the EU's obligatory good will. Moreover, by intensifying strategic communication, the EU takes a big gamble. Brussels (and most EU member states) assume that ordinary Russians (not belonging to the cultural elite) can be encouraged to embrace Europe's post-modern norms and values. For the moment, the EU–Russia values' gap is widening. Whereas the EU pushes LGBT rights and the European Parliament has nominated the three (at that time jailed) members of the Russian feminist performance-art group Pussy Riot for the Sakharov human rights prize (in 2012), Russian society is embracing traditional family values as well as a newly found patriotism. Given current Russian distrust of EU policy (based on what is widely seen as the EU's support for a political coup in Kiev in 2014), and the traditional and nationalist streak of Russian society, such a move towards the EU's post-modern outlook will simply not happen.[41] Moreover, the EU's communication strategy *vis-à-vis* Russia is eerily similar to US President Bush's neo-conservative policies to change the mindset of the 'Arab Street' after 9/11, which had very modest results.[42]

38 James Panichi, 'EU Declares Information War on Russia', *Politico.eu* (27 August 2015).

39 'Toespraak Minister Koenders Tijdens een Bijeenkomst over 40 Jaar Helsinki-Akkoorden'.

40 Janene van Jaarsveldt, 'Dutch Open Doors to Russian LGBT Asylum Claims', *NlTimes.nl* (8 September 2015).

41 'Russians Value Tolerance and Civility More Than Freedom of Speech – Poll', *TASS* (13 August 2015); and Alicja Curanovic, 'The Guardians of Traditional Values: Russia and the Orthodox Russian Church in the Quest For Status', *Transatlantic Academy Papers*, no. 1 (2015).

42 Robin Wright, 'U.S. Struggles To Win Hearts, Minds in the Muslim World – Diplomacy Efforts Lack Funds, Follow-Through', *The Washington Post* (20 August 2004).

5 The Elephant in the Room

In September 2015, Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Koenders asked '[i]s Helsinki [that is, the current OSCE framework] – and with it, Europe's security architecture – lacking something?' His answer was (not surprisingly) a clear 'no': 'All the principles of Helsinki are still relevant', he argued, suggesting that the rules and structure of European security are fine and dandy.[43] Around the same time, Russia's Permanent Representative to the EU, Ambassador Vladimir Chizkov, asked 'whether Russia and the EU are genuinely able and willing to construct an indivisible pan-European security and economic architecture that would pursue cooperative "win–win" scenarios, or, instead, are we doomed to going our separate ways?'[44] Ambassador Chizkov repeated the old complaint that Russia's legitimate interests are not taken into account by the EU (and the West in general), and that a new economic and security bargain with Russia is needed 'to jointly deal with the manifold crises unfolding in our so-called "common neighbourhoods"'.[45] To most Western policy-makers, the very idea of tampering with Europe's contemporary security arrangement is anathema. The question of Russia's long-standing qualms and demands for such a new security bargain[46] remains the infamous 'elephant in the room': we can all see it, and ignoring its presence is at our own peril. The question is whether the current crises (over Ukraine with Russia, and the post-Paris 'war on terror') necessitates such a new European security bargain, or whether it will be considered as caving in to Moscow's demands.

The United Kingdom's 2015 House of Lords Report on the EU's relationship with Russia concludes that 'a serious dialogue on issues of shared interest, such as a common economic space and a shared security architecture, as well as cultural cooperation and educational exchanges' could have a positive effect and alleviate the adversarial mindset on both sides.[47] This line of thought has a long pedigree. Following ideas by Russian President Medvedev (in 2008), the OSCE initiated its so-called 'Corfu Process' (in 2009) with a view to modifying Europe's security arrangement. This process proved to be quicksand for diplomatic efforts, which were ultimately bogged down by Moscow's ham-fisted demand for a *droit de regard* (right of inspection) on key security matters and Western distrust of Russia's motives. Given that Western distrust seems substantiated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and its meddling in eastern Ukraine, one may reasonable

43 'Toespraak Minister Koenders Tijdens een Bijeenkomst over 40 Jaar Helsinki-Akkoorden'.

44 'Ambassador Vladimir Chizkov's Address at the Alpbach Forum 2015', *Alpbach Forum* (31 August 2015).

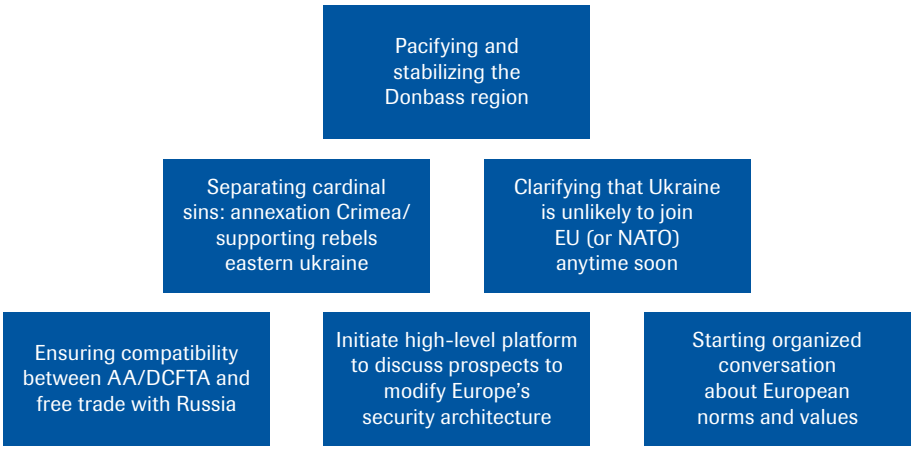
45 'Ambassador Vladimir Chizkov's Address at the Alpbach Forum 2015'.

46 Bobo Lo, 'Medvedev and the New European Security Architecture', *CER Policy Brief* (July 2009).

47 'The EU and Russia', *UK House of Lords* (2015), p. 92.

question whether the West should yield to Russia's relentless bullying. Still, one could equally argue that it would be a pity to 'waste a good crisis'. When the heat is turned up, solids tend to become fluid, and Europe's security architecture may not escape this tenet of physics and politics. Since the November 2015 Paris terror attacks, the security 'crisis' has turned into a real 'war', where the West and Russia share similar security interests and *de facto* need each other. In strategic terms, the Paris attacks have changed everything.

Figure 3 A constructive approach towards Russia



What does this mean for EU policy towards Russia? *First*, the EU should ensure that Ukraine's AA/DCFTA (which is signed but not yet ratified) will be compatible with Kiev's commitments for free trade with Russia (see figure 3).[48] Since February 2015, no fewer than five trilateral meetings have been held (the latest in November 2015), bringing together EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavlo Klimkin and Russia's Minister of Economic Development Alexei Ulyukayev. The main goal of these meetings has been to 'find practical solutions to Russian concerns about the implementation of the DCFTA'.[49] Clearly, Brussels now acknowledges that Russia needs to be involved in any future EU–Ukraine trade deal. However, no practical solutions have been agreed, mainly because Russia has – despite

48 Alexander Mercouris, 'How the EU Association Agreement Makes Existing Ukraine–Russia Trade Links Impossible', *Russia Insider* (4 May 2015).

49 European Commission Directorate-General for Trade, 'Outcome of the Trilateral Talks on the Implementation of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement/Deep and Comprehensive Trade Area', Brussels (7 September 2015).

its many vocal complaints – failed to come up with credible data that could form the basis for compromises.

Although the Donbass region is now devastated by war (with more than 1.1 million internally displaced persons) and lawlessness, Ukraine's future without this economic powerhouse remains hard to imagine. Although the total industrial production of the Donbass region almost halved from 1988 to 2012, the region still accounts for some 22 per cent of Ukraine's industrial output (US$ 12.5 billion in 2013); the rest of Ukraine is dominated by agriculture.[50] If the AA/DCFTA is to enter into force unchanged, Ukraine would face serious economic consequences and enter a phase of *de facto* economic warfare with Russia. Kiev suspended military cooperation with Russia (in March 2014), which has had a serious impact on Russia's defence capabilities. Until 2014, Ukraine provided important raw materials for Russia's defence and space industries, which include intercontinental missiles, along with spare parts. The Donbass region produced a special steel for Russian tanks and most of Russia's combat helicopters fly with engines from Ukraine's Motor Sich factories in Zaporizhia.[51] As Igor Sutyagin has argued, '[i]t would be extremely difficult for Motor Sich, which produces the helicopter and jet engines, to find a European market because [the market] is already dense and these engines do not perfectly fit the European and world standards, quality standards, noise standards, pollution standards'.[52]

When the heat is turned up, solids tend to become fluid, and Europe's security architecture may not escape this tenet of physics and politics.

It is clear that (in its current form) the EU–Ukraine AA/DCFTA will practically pull the plug on Ukraine's economy, making the country fully dependent on EU (and Western) economic and financial support. The reincorporation of the Donbass region into Ukraine would become very difficult, since the region's economic prospects would collapse, resulting in massive unemployment and hence political dissatisfaction and unrest. It should also be remembered that the Donbass region has always been referred to as a 'no man's land', attracting freedom-seekers and free spirits. During the Stalinist 1930s and beyond, the Donbass region even had a reputation as a safe haven for

50 Vlad Mykhnenko, 'Die Ökonomische Bedeutung des Ukrainischen Donbass', *DGO Ukraine-Analysen*, no. 147 (11 March 2015), p. 3.

51 Anna Maria Dyner, 'What Ending Cooperation on Armaments Means for Russia and Ukraine', *PISM Bulletin*, no. 50 (15 April 2014).

52 Charles Recknagel, 'Complex Ties: Russia's Armed Forces Depend on Ukraine's Military Industry', *RFE/RL* (28 March 2014).

refugees, and as a 'free steppe' for 'undesirable social elements'.[53] 'Choosing for Europe' (as the AA/DCFTA is now framed) implies that the Donbass region has no economic prospects whatsoever, and places Ukraine's economic (and hence political) future in the hands of an EU that is bogged down by its own serious problems. This is a risk that Ukraine should be unwilling to take and a responsibility that the EU should be unwilling to shoulder. Against this backdrop, the EU's AA/DCFTA with Ukraine should be amended and any hints of Ukraine's integration into the EU should be scrapped. The EU should also increase its pressure on Moscow to find practical solutions to ensure the compatibility of a future EU–Ukraine deal with Kiev's free-trade commitments to Russia.

Western political leaders should also clarify that Ukraine is unlikely to join the EU any time soon. Again, this should not be framed as a faint-hearted surrender to Russian demands, but as an expression of economic and political realities, just as EU Commission President Juncker proclaimed (in 2014) that there will be no admissions of new members during his term (that is, until 2020). This would at least offer (some) clarity that Ukraine will not join the EU for the next few decades. Just as most EU applicant countries in the Western Balkans have ruined their chances to 'join Europe' any time soon because of endemic corruption and crime,[54] Ukraine will not earn EU membership on merit.

A similar statement should also be made by NATO leaders. The communiqué of NATO's Bucharest Summit (April 2008) that the Alliance 'welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro–Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO' has proven to be premature and over-confident. Backtracking on these political promises will be difficult, but they should not be reiterated or confirmed. Such an approach would express the reality that there is only modest (and rather fragile) political support for Ukraine to join the Alliance.[55]

Second, the EU should unambiguously disconnect Russia's two cardinal sins: its annexation of Crimea; and its support for anti-government rebels in eastern Ukraine. The EU already has two separate sanctions' regimes in place, one for eastern Ukraine (linked to the Minsk Protocol) and one for Crimea. However, both sanctions' policies remain tied at the hip, both in practice and in the public discourse and imagination. The EU would be well-advised to detach these sanctions' regimes more distinctly, for obvious strategic reasons. Crimea is irrevocably lost to Ukraine and the EU should

53 Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Ukraine, Russia and the Donbass in Historical Perspective* (Washington, DC: National Research Council for Soviet and East European Studies, September 1996).

54 Peter van Ham, 'Gridlock, Corruption and Crime in the Western Balkans: Why the EU Must Acknowledge Its Limits', *Clingendael Report* (October 2014).

55 Katie Simmons, Bruce Stokes and Jacob Poushter, *NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukraine Crisis, But Reluctant To Provide Military Aid* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 10 June 2015).

understand that this was inevitable, given the key strategic importance of the Crimean Peninsula for Russia's military interests. We all know that the decree transferring the Crimean Oblast from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in February 1954 was a 'brotherly' symbolic gesture, marking the 300th anniversary of Ukraine joining the Russian Empire. What is less known is that, as Anton Bebler argues, this 'transfer of Crimea to Ukraine was [...] illegal even in Soviet terms, unconstitutional and clearly illegitimate'.[56] Since 1991, Russia has made contingency plans for the annexation of Crimea, and in 1993, the Russian State Duma even adopted a resolution declaring Sevastopol as Russian territory. Bebler argues that the Russian 'decision to annex Crimea at an opportune moment was probably made in 2008, soon after NATO at its Bucharest summit promised Ukraine (and Georgia) future membership in the Alliance'.[57] For Russia, the rationale of annexing Crimea is geopolitical, rather than evidence of a rekindled imperialist campaign. A comparison can be made with the US naval base (of some 45 square miles) at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Cuban authorities argue that the US military base violates Cuban sovereignty and amounts to a *de facto* military occupation.[58]

Western political leaders should also clarify that Ukraine is unlikely to join the EU any time soon.

Solving the crisis in eastern Ukraine is the EU's first priority and Brussels should focus all of its diplomatic energy on this issue. Just as the EU has a productive working relationship (and even a customs union) with Turkey, which is occupying the northern part of EU member state Cyprus, a *modus vivendi* should be sought with Russia (and Ukraine) on Crimea. As Henry Kissinger suggested in September 2014, 'Crimea [should] be given a special status within Ukraine safeguarding Russia's security interests'.[59] Michael O'Hanlon and Jeremy Shapiro suggest that 'Russia can make its historically based claim on Crimea but would have to accept a binding referendum under outside monitoring that would determine the region's future, with independence as one option'.[60] However, eastern Ukraine's Donbass region should be pacified and stabilized, preferably under a UN Interim Administration, as was recently the case in Kosovo (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), from 1999–2008) and East Timor

56 Bebler, 'Crimea and the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict', p. 38.

57 Bebler, 'Crimea and the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict', p. 40.

58 'US Rejects Cuba Demand to Hand Back Guantanamo Bay Base', *BBC News* (30 January 2015).

59 Bronwen Maddox, 'New World Disorder: An Interview with Henry Kissinger', *Prospect* (18 September 2014).

60 Michael O'Hanlon and Jeremy Shapiro, 'Crafting a Win–Win–Win for Russia, Ukraine and the West', *The Washington Post* (7 December 2014).

(*United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor* (UNTAET), from 1999–2002). This option was first proposed by Andrej Novak in November 2014:

> *A UN protectorate in the Donbass region would be costly and require a multinational force of UN blue helmets with a robust mandate. It would of course require Russian support in the UN Security Council, which many observers would consider unlikely to be forthcoming. Yet, the Kremlin might just decide that a UN protectorate bankrolled for the most part by Western countries would solve a number of primarily financial, but also political and military problems, and serve as the elusive off-ramp allowing a somewhat face-saving way of getting out of the costly mess in Ukraine.*[61]

These are practical – and wise – words, which have not received the attention that they deserve. However, it is not too late to investigate whether Russia may be prepared to accept such a UN Interim Authority, particularly if this becomes part of a broader, more comprehensive, European security bargain. Until now, Ukraine has been reluctant to accept a more pronounced UN role, mainly because this would give Russia (as a permanent member of the UN Security Council) undue influence over eastern Ukraine's destiny. Still, Kiev may ultimately acknowledge that such an option is preferable to an unwieldy, frozen conflict within its borders.

Third, the EU should initiate a high-level platform to discuss prospects to modify Europe's security architecture. The calls for a possible new European security bargain are loudest from Russia and its cohort of so-called *Putinversteher* (German for 'those who understand Putin'). Yet even reasonable voices like Henry Kissinger's argue that 'the West should be prepared to discuss a concept of order that takes account of Russian concerns and Ukraine's right to independence'. Kissinger therefore suggests that the best outcome is a Ukraine that functions as 'a bridge between east and west', rather than a Western 'outpost', for 'if Ukraine is treated by either side as an outpost, a new Cold War is inevitable'.[62] Although the EU (and the West in general) is unlikely to offer Russia a *droit de regard* in their 'shared neighbourhoods', something has to be done to overcome the current stalemate. First and foremost, both the EU (as well as Ukraine, the United States and NATO) and Russia should be offered a face-saving way out (or, in this case, process), which can be sold to their respective domestic publics as a reasonable and positive solution to the current crisis in eastern Ukraine. The EU and Ukraine have to acknowledge that Crimea may be lost to Russia, perhaps after a new referendum. Moscow should use all of its available powers to encourage stability in the Donbass region. When all of the parties involved compromise, a basis can be

61 Andrej Novak, 'What's Peace in the Donbass Worth To Us?', *Bündnis90 – Die Grünen* (5 November 2014).

62 Quoted in Maddox, 'New World Disorder'.

found to start such a much-needed debate about the precise nature of a new European security bargain. How this should look, whether it should involve agreements on basing foreign troops in certain countries, a revived Treaty on *Conventional Armed Forces in Europe* (CFE) (which Russia abrogated in March 2015) and agreements on (theatre) missile defence in Europe should all be open. Yet what should certainly top the agenda are shared security concerns, such as fighting jihadism and the Islamic State, halting WMD proliferation and organized crime, as well as a shared vision for pan-European energy security.

The OSCE may be the most appropriate institutional place to manage such a diplomatic circus, even though the Corfu Process (as mentioned above) failed miserably. Germany's 2016 Chairmanship of the OSCE (backed by Serbia and Austria as part of the so-called 'troika') offers chances for strong leadership to get quick results. The European Parliament's S&D group has already called for an OSCE Summit in 2016, which could be used to reinvigorate dialogue with Russia. Moscow has given several OSCE meetings a miss over the past year, but may be enticed to agree to an OSCE Summit (which is not organized on a regular basis) if the agenda includes an open and sincere debate on a new European security bargain. This may well be supported by the Netherlands' EU Presidency in the first half of 2016, if policy-makers in Berlin and The Hague choose to embrace such an initiative.

Fourth, and finally, the EU should start an organized conversation with Russia about European norms and values. The EU not only prides itself as the main (and perhaps even sole) guardian of Europe's code of ethics, but also as a mediator in the so-called 'dialogue of civilizations'. This dialogue was initiated by the UN (in 2001), at least partly to avoid the 'clash of civilizations' that seemed to be in the offing after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. In March 2006, EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner argued that '[f]or me, intercultural dialogue is the defining issue of this decade, in the Euro-med region and beyond'.[63] The EU has been engaged in such a dialogue with Mediterranean countries in an effort to repair relations with the Muslim world, trying to escape unnecessary conflicts and to strengthen mutual understanding. Since 2004, the Anna Lindh Foundation (which aims 'to bring people together from across the Mediterranean to improve mutual respect between cultures and to support civil society working for a common future for the region')[64] has been supported financially and politically by the EU, and constitutes an integral part of the EU's policy towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Clearly, such a dialogue is needed today with Russia as well, and for similar reasons: encouraging people-to-people contact and avoiding the escalation of practical misunderstandings in the realms of culture,

63 Speech by EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner: 'Dialogue of Cultures – Clash of Civilizations or Clash of Ignorance?', *Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, Plenary Session*, Brussels (27 March 2006).

64 See online at http://www.annalindhfoundation.org/.

civilization and religion. Existing institutional frameworks such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE may be used to host such a dialogue, which should also include Eastern European countries, including Ukraine.

Russia has taken up the role as a guardian of 'traditional values', based on national pride, religion and family. Russia's 2008 Foreign Policy Concept states that '[i]t is for the first time in the contemporary history that global competition is acquiring a civilizational dimension which suggests competition between different value systems'.[65] In his famous September 2013 Valdai Speech, President Putin alleges that:

> *The Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilization. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. […] People in many European countries are embarrassed or afraid to talk about their religious affiliations. Holidays are abolished or even called something different; their essence is hidden away, as is their moral foundation. And people are aggressively trying to export this model all over the world. I am convinced that this opens a direct path to degradation and primitivism, resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis.*[66]

President Putin certainly claims moral superiority to gain status, both at home and abroad, and to put Russia forward as an inter-faith mediator. At the same time, Russia has tried to reframe the Ukraine crisis as a 'civilizational choice' for Kiev, between its true Eurasian roots and the 'nihilistic liberalism' promoted by the EU and the West. The notion of a *Russkiy Mir* ('Russian World') is increasingly used by Moscow to reach out to ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers, as well as communities of the Russian Orthodox faith across Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans.[67] Although this is hardly different from Ankara's notion of a 'Turkic World',[68] it has affected the EU's belief that it is the sole provider of 'European' norms and values across the continent. Establishing a new, organized conversation with Russia about the nature and diversity of Europe's norms and values may therefore also encourage the EU to leave the comfortable habitat of its moral high ground, and to come to terms with the complexity of today's ethical landscape. As European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans argued in September 2015 in the context of the EU's uncontrolled migration

65 President of Russia, *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (12 August 2008).

66 'Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club', *Valdai Discussion Club* (20 September 2013).

67 See, for example, the website of the Russkiy Mir Foundation: http://russkiymir.ru/en/.

68 Bayram Balci, *Turkey's Religious Outreach in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 27 January 2014).

crisis: 'The caricature of a xenophobic East is just as malicious and wrong as that of a culturally auto-destructive West'.[69] Creating a Russian 'Other' is an emotional response to a complex geostrategic problem, and should therefore be avoided.

The EU should acknowledge the urgent necessity to cooperate with Russia, politically and militarily, to fight jihadism and the Islamic State, in Syria as well as in Europe.

These four elements could form the foundation of a new, more realistic and practical EU–Russia relationship. Russia's Syrian gambit, combined with Kiev's growing willingness to accept a loose, quasi-federal structure for Ukraine, opens a window of opportunity that demands Western statesmanship (including by the EU). The EU should acknowledge the urgent necessity to cooperate with Russia, politically and militarily, to fight jihadism and the Islamic State, in Syria as well as in Europe. This new reality should be appreciated as an opportunity to leave the existing impasse in EU–Russia relations. It also sends the clear message that in a greater, geostrategic framework, Russia is the EU's partner, rather than its rival. This should also make it easier to put the ideational differences between post-modern Europe and modern Russia in context. European policy-makers should now recognize these distinctions and quarrels for what they are: minor and inconsequential. Although the political ramifications of this 'deal' with Russia will not be to everybody's liking, the likely outcome will ultimately be to everyone's benefit, including Ukraine's. Most importantly, it ensures that the West is not sleepwalking into a 'Cold Peace', or even a renewed 'hot' conflict with Russia. The EU may even benefit from this existential crisis on its own continent to make a shift towards strategic maturity, accepting Russia – and international politics in general – as it is, and not as Brussels' policy-makers desire it to be.

69 Frans Timmermans, 'Une Solidarité De Fait: Speech by First Vice-President Timmermans', Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', The Hague (18 September 2015).

Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
BSF	Black Sea Fleet
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Agreement
EU	European Union
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCC	Parliamentary Cooperation Committee
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialist and Democrats
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
UN	United Nations
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction