The Russian Federation and the European Union: Developing a Framework for Navigating a Complex Relationship

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation (RF) can be characterized as a complex fusion of conflict and cooperation. This research paper argues that the two political entities should prioritize maintaining a constructive relationship and amiable foreign relations. The three chief areas of economic and energy security, international security, and regional stability frame the nature of the EU-Russia partnership. A potential framework to navigate that relationship should address both areas of cooperation and conflict, while promoting transparency, security, and stability. By examining the complex relations of the EU and Russia on different levels of cooperation, policymakers can benefit from a better understanding of the partnership between the two entities. Future research initiatives could focus on identifying precise policies that can further advance the relationship between the EU and the Russian Federation.

Introduction

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation (RF) can be characterized as a complex fusion of conflict and cooperation. Given that both entities are major global players in international relations, it is exceptionally important to devise a comprehensive framework that will aid policymakers and scholars in navigating this complicated relationship. The European Union and Russia interact with each other on a wide variety of economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural issues. Following the end of the Cold War, Russia- EU bilateral relations remained aggrieved and further deteriorated after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and the Ukraine conflict (Zheng, 2021). Although the two entities are politically and economically interdependent, they engage in disputes over a number of issues, such as ideological disagreements, Russian interferences in European Union affairs, and tensions over the supply of energy. This research paper aims to address the question of whether EU-Russia relations should be maintained and develop a framework for managing the evolving and complex relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation. This paper argues that the two political entities should prioritize maintaining a constructive relationship and amiable foreign relations and aims to outline reasons in favor of EU-Russian cooperation and their beneficial consequences. A potential framework to navigate that relationship should address both areas of cooperation and conflict, while promoting transparency, security, and stability.

The research paper is structured into three sections that examine the main areas of EU- Russia relations, discuss points of conflict, address counterpoints, and exemplify the benefits of effective engagement and active cooperation between the two political entities. In addition to arguing in favor of EU-Russia cooperation, the three sections also serve as the understructure of a comprehensive framework for navigating this complex relationship. Counterpoints to the notion that the European Union and the Russian Federation should practice effective engagement and foster cooperation are centered on the notion that Moscow is an unreliable partner for the EU and are discussed in the appropriate sections. Concerns over some counterpoints are valid; however, this paper maintains that they serve as an incentive for both the EU and the Russian Federation to iron out disagreements and diffuse tension by focusing on fostering the foundational areas of their partnership. Instead of focusing on the challenges to a successful partnership, the two entities should place an emphasis on transparency, cooperation, and trust. Consequently, the challenges will be resolved swiftly.

The first section addresses the key area of economic and energy security and argues in favor of the enhancement of economic cooperation. Additionally, this section highlights the importance of maintaining the energy trade between the European Union and the Russian Federation, despite geopolitical and security concerns. The second section of the paper focuses on the aspect of international security by examining EU-Russia relations in the context of current international conflicts and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion. The third section discusses regional stability and examines the significance of EU-Russian relations in addressing regional issues in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. The final section offers concluding remarks, outlines a framework for navigating the partnership, and describes relevance to policymakers.

Economic and Energy Security Overview of EU-Russia Economic Relations

The economic aspect of the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation can be identified as one of the most complex issues in contemporary international relations. In 2019, trade between the two political entities exceeded 250 billion USD, which is comparable to the European trade with the United States or China (European Commission, 2023). Additionally, according to Russian estimates, European Union investment into the Russian economy surpasses 260 billion USD and reversely, the Russian Federation invests over 75 billion USD into European Union member states (Lavrov, 2013). The European Union is Russia's largest trading partner and the Russian Federation is one of the Union's largest and most significant trading partners (European Commission, 2023). Both sides are interdependent on the bilateral trade of goods and services; thus, certain vulnerabilities and security concerns have emerged. In recent years, the economic relationship has been affected by economic policy disagreements, political tensions, and numerous imposed sanctions aimed at curtailing trade initiatives ("EU Sanctions against Russia," 2023). Consequently, policymakers and the public have called into question the future of EU-Russia economic relations. The Russian Federation's unreliability as a trade partner for the European Union has been highlighted, causing many lawmakers to advocate for a tougher stance against Russia. This section of the paper advocates for the enhancement of economic cooperation between the two entities by defending the continuation of the energy trade and discussing the possible beneficial outcomes of the partnership.

The Energy Trade Explained

The most central and notorious component of the economic relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation can be identified as the energy trade. The European Union is not self-sustaining regarding its energy consumption and the energy needs of member states are met through imports from third countries (Tajoli, 2022). The dependency rate of the European Union is estimated to be around 58 percent in 2020 and it is calculated in order to determine the extent to which an economy is reliant upon imports to meet its energy demands (Tajoli, 2022). Given the EU's high dependency rate, the Union utilizes imports from non-EU states to supplement its energy requirements. The significance of EU-Russia bilateral cooperation becomes evident when examining their energy interdependence. Russian exports of oil and natural gas to European states account for the majority of economic interaction between the two entities. In 2018, approximately 40 percent of European gas was imported from Russia; therefore, making Russia one of Europe's largest suppliers of energy (Popovic, 2020). What is more, the European Union is Russia's largest customer of natural gas, given that exports to European countries account for a sizeable portion of Russian total energy exports (Popovic, 2020). In 2018, approximately 58 percent of total Russian gas exports were received by the European Union (Tajoli, 2022). Russia's state-owned energy corporation, Gazprom, primarily exports natural gas to Europe, with over 80 percent of exports being directed to countries in Western Europe (Popovic, 2020). Over the last decade, Germany and Italy held the first and second positions as main customers of Russian energy (Tajoli, 2022). Overall, the European Union and the Russian Federation are intertwined in a complex energy trade relationship. The next subsection

addresses geopolitical and security concerns that have been raised by critics of the EU's dependence on imports of Russian natural gas.

Geopolitical and Security Concerns: Counterpoints to EU-Russia Energy Partnership

The energy relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation has become increasingly controversial due to the geopolitical rivalry between the two political entities and the Federation's alleged use of its energy dominance to promote its interests and exert political pressure in the post-Soviet space and Europe ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). Given Russia's energy superiority and natural gas production capabilities, it possesses the ability to leverage its resources as defensive tools and utilize them to achieve its political and economic goals ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). The European Union has accused Russia of using tactics, such as supply cuts, strategic asset control, contractual restrictions, and alternative supply routes as a means of coercion ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). Moreover, Gazprom, Russia's government-owned monopoly, has also been accused of manipulating commercial agreements to advance the Kremlin's foreign policy objectives ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). Despite concerns over Russian manipulation of the energy partnership, the European Union has not ended the energy trade. Lawmakers that are disapproving of the energy interdependence have criticized the European Union for enabling the authoritarian state's use of energy exports to assert its objectives and interests abroad ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). By remaining a customer of Russian gas, the Union has been condemned by critics for contributing to Russia's aggressive foreign policy agenda and for making European member states overly exposed to Russian political interference ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). Notably, post-Soviet states and Eastern European countries with higher levels of energy dependence on Russian energy are significantly more at risk from market manipulations by the Russian Federation (Binhack and Tichý, 2012). Western European member states possess a significantly more equalized energy relationship and hold more leverage in these highly contested economic relations. To conclude, security and geopolitical concerns are valid due to Russia's aggressive foreign policy conduct; however, ending the energy partnership will have negative impacts on both parties.

In Defense of the Energy Trade

Concerns over economic security and unrestricted Russian control of European energy supplies could be misconstrued as arguments for ending the energy relationship between the two political entities. It is important to recognize that the energy partnership between the European Union and the Russian Federation, as well as their overall relationship, are not unidirectional phenomena (Popovic, 2020). Both parties hold leverage and can exert political, economic, and social pressure on each other if determined to do so. Ending the energy relationship will have severe negative impacts on both parties, particularly the European Union due to its lack of reliable diversification options and alternative supply routes (Popovic, 2020). An unexpected and sudden pause in Russian gas imports could potentially cause supply shortages and tremendously increased prices for natural gas for all European member states ("Energy as Tool of Foreign

Policy," 2018). Currently, Russian natural gas is the most reliable energy supply option and offers the lowest energy prices ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). Consequently, ending the energy trade will have severe consequences for European households. According to the research data of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), abrupt discontinuation of Russian gas imports could cause shortages of up to 40 percent of gas consumption in numerous Central and Eastern European states, such as Slovakian, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (Flanagan et al., 2022). In a potential end of the EU- Russia energy trade relationship, the Union would be forced to implement less reliable and accessible energy alternatives; thus, driving prices even higher and undermining energy security in the process. European households will become extremely vulnerable to market instability and high energy prices ("Energy as Tool of Foreign Policy," 2018). Essentially, halting the energy trade between the two political entities will disadvantage and hurt ordinary households and could even influence Eastern European states to move politically closer to Russia in order to mitigate the energy crisis with chapter Russian natural gas.

Beneficial Outcomes of the Economic Partnership

Beneficial outcomes of the energy trade between the European Union and the Russian Federation include energy security, economic growth, and technological advancements. The EU and Russia share a number of common interests in the sphere of economics (Antonenkno and Pinnick, 2004). As previously mentioned, Russia provides the Union with approximately a third of its natural gas and oil, and the Federation is the only economic partner that can commit to secure and guaranteed deliveries in such large amounts (Lavrov, 2013). Given that renewable energy resources and alternative supply routes from other third parties are not able to completely satisfy European energy needs (Popovic, 2020), the Russian Federation and its gas exports tremendously contribute to the energy security of the European Union. In turn, Russia benefits from having a fixed customer and generates wealth through guaranteed energy exports to the European Union. Since both political entities hold leverage in the energy partnership, the European Union is able to negotiate appropriate deals and even counter Russian attempts to manipulate energy contracts and exert political pressure over European member states.

Furthermore, the EU-Russia energy trade partnership provides economic benefits to both parties in the form of economic growth. By enhancing economic cooperation and maintaining friendly foreign relations, both parties gain access to new market spaces, facilitate the creation of jobs, and expand their economic growth. Faced with the option to end economic relations and suffer numerous negative consequences or stick to strategic cooperation and reap the benefits, both the EU and Russia have chosen to keep economic and trade relations intact and relatively stable (Zheng, 2021). Moreover, the two political entities benefit from exchanging technological expertise and furthering technological enhancements through economic cooperation. The Russian Federation and the European Union have launched various modernization partnership initiatives aimed at collaboration between the two parties on research, technological, and innovative projects (Lavrov, 2013). By exchanging expertise and knowledge, the EU and the Russian Federation can better address new challenges in the globalizing world, as well as improve political relations by fostering mutual interests and promoting projects that require collaboration, negotiation, and transparency. In sum, economic cooperation and the

continuation of the energy trade have the potential to foster economic growth, provide energy security, and inspire technological advancements and shared research projects.

To conclude this section, the analysis of the economic and energy partnership between Russia and the European Union exemplifies the importance of improving socio-economic ties and employing peaceful means to resolve conflicts and disagreements. By examining the economic relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation, the importance of maintaining a successful partnership between the two entities becomes evident. Although there are numerous political, geopolitical, and security concerns and counterarguments, it is more beneficial for the EU and Russia to work through disputes peacefully and strive to maintain friendly foreign relations. The economic partnership, most notably manifested through the energy trade, is one aspect of the overall relationship between the two political entities. I have decided to dedicate the first section of the research paper to the economic aspect due to its complicated and contested nature. The second section of the paper will focus on the maintenance of international security and examine current international conflicts.

International Security: Overview of EU-Russian Approaches to International Affairs

The second vital area of the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation can be identified as international security. In this section, the research question of whether EU-Russia relations should be maintained in relation to international security will be examined. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War, Western literature on security has focused largely on Russia's confrontation with Europe (Zaslavskaya and Averre, 2019). The expectation that Russia would adhere to European norms and values and accept EU conceptions of the liberal democratic order was never achieved (Zaslavskaya and Averre, 2019). The cohesion between the two political entities has been undermined by concerns over economic sanctions employed by the European Union, hybrid warfare employed by the Russian Federation, and various disinformation campaigns aimed at manipulating public opinion (Zaslavskaya and Averre, 2019). Nevertheless, cooperation on international security issues between two globally powerful political entities is of prime importance. This section focuses on the significance of EU-Russia collaboration in the field of international affairs by discussing foreign policy approaches and addressing areas of conflict, such as the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the crisis in Ukraine. Before examining the relationship between Russia and the EU in the field of international security, their respective approaches to foreign policy ought to be considered.

The European Foreign Policy Approach

The foreign policy approach of the European Union is centered on resolving conflicts and fostering international understanding and respect for international rules ("Foreign and Security Policy – EU Action"). According to official statements of the EU, the foreign policy objectives of the Union are aimed at preserving peace, promoting international cooperation, strengthening international security, and consolidating the rule of law, respect for human rights, and democracy

("Foreign and Security Policy – EU Action"). The European Union has no standing army and relies exclusively on ad hoc forces of its member states ("Foreign and Security Policy – EU Action"). Moreover, the European Council serves as the decision-making body of the Union ("Foreign and Security Policy – EU Action"). Consequently, the heads of state of all member states have authority in most foreign policy and security decisions. The objective of EU foreign policy is to promote and protect European interests and values abroad ("Foreign and Security Policy – EU Action"). Upon examining these objectives, it becomes clear that they are rooted in Western liberal notions.

Given that the Russian Federation does not aspire to integrate Western liberal values into its national identity, the cooperation between the two entities in the international sphere becomes complex. In fact, Russia oftentimes defines its own interests in opposition to European values in an attempt to accentuate the Russian national identity (Zaslavskaya and Averre, 2019). In turn, there is valid criticism regarding the European Union's bold promotion of its Western-centric worldview and the lack of consideration and tolerance toward other world perceptions. Next, the Russian foreign policy approach will be discussed.

The Russian Foreign Policy Approach

The foreign policy approach of the Russian Federation has rapidly evolved and increased its scope of ambition since the rise of power of President Vladimir Putin (Bordachev, 2018). The Federation has developed a strategic foreign policy concept, coupled it with geographic aspirations, and established itself as an independent development center rather than the periphery of Europe or Asia (Bordachev, 2018). The Federation's foreign policy approach can be characterized as highly assertive and aimed at reasserting Russian influence in the world and protecting Russian national interest. In recent years, Russia has turned to Asia in an attempt to solidify itself as a Eurasian power through the Greater Eurasia initiative (Bordachev, 2018). In addition to asserting itself as a Eurasian power, Russian foreign policy efforts are also aimed at reintegrating the post-Soviet space into its sphere of influence (Krikovic, 2014). The future of Ukraine is highly contested and at the center of the different foreign policy approaches of the Russian and the European camps (Krikovic, 2014). Regional security will be thoroughly discussed in the next section of the paper. It is evident that Russia's foreign policy approach is targeted toward development and the establishment of Russia as a major power in the modern world (Bordachev, 2018). This trend of global and regional development exemplifies that Russia's foreign policy approach cannot be confined to Western liberal notions of worldview and conduct of foreign policy. Consequently, many conflicts and disagreements between Russia and the European Union are based on these fundamental differences in their respective approach to foreign policy.

Areas of Conflict: Counterpoints to US-Russia International Security Relations

In order to answer the research question of whether EU-Russia relations are beneficial and should be continued long-term in relation to international affairs, it is important to examine points of tension and consider possible counterarguments. The two main areas of conflict regarding the

enlargement of NATO and the Ukraine crisis will be discussed. The conflict in Ukraine is classified as an international security issue rather than a regional security issue due to the ongoing escalation and the involvement of numerous global actors. Although Ukraine is not an official member of the European Union, it has been granted candidate status and the European Union has been tremendously invested in the development and security of Ukraine.

Expansion of NATO

The mistrust between the European Union and the Russian Federation traces its origins back to the Cold War and the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The post-Cold War imbalances of power and the largely incompatible national and foreign policy interests of Russia and the Western camp have further exacerbated the problem (Tsygankov, 2013). Established as a response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization continued to expand eastward even after the Soviet Union had collapsed (McGwire, 1998). Although the threat of Soviet aggression had been eliminated, the Western nations continued to incorporate former members of the Warsaw Pact into NATO as a defense against the potential threat of a Russian revival (McGwire, 1998). NATO's reach has expanded tremendously from 1955 to 2023 and includes most of Eastern Europe and a number of former Soviet republics. By 1999, NATO had swiftly expanded into Eastern and Central Europe and the countries of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic were all admitted as member states (McGwire, 1998). In 2023, there are 31 official member states, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has expanded across the Balkans, the Baltic states, and recently the Republic of Finland has also been accepted (John, 2023).

From a Russian perspective, the Federation has perceived this rapid expansion as a potential threat to their natural security (Götz, 2017). President Putin has publicly disapproved of the enlargement of NATO, the establishment of military bases in Eastern Europe, and the dominance of Western/European powers in the international sphere (Prince, 2020). Russia has pledged to actively counter NATO advances that approximate its borders and has resorted to assertive foreign policy initiatives in dealing with the former Soviet republics in order to create a security zone and protect its territory against NATO's expansion (Götz, 2017). Russia's buffer zone had undoubtedly been eroded. Conflicts over the enlargement of NATO and the irreconcilable differences in foreign policy approaches and interests have called into question the overall relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation. Although counterarguments against maintaining the partnership between the two political entities are reasonable, particularly by bringing up the vast differences and conflicting natures of the EU and Russia, they should serve as facilitators for change. The two clashing sides should employ diplomatic means and tools of negotiation to devise a solution to the NATO problem going forward, instead of severing ties or engaging in open conflict.

The Ukrainian Crisis

Currently, the largest conflict in the relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation can be identified as the Russia-Ukraine crisis that escalated into a full-blown armed

conflict on February 21, 2022 (Ahmed et al., 2022). Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the partnership between Moscow and the European Union in the sphere of international security has been incredibly strained and complex. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Russia provided support for the separatist territories of Donetsk and Luhansk and aimed to solidify its role in the Donbas region as a protector of ethnic Russians (Carment et al., 2019). Additionally, Russia employed a variety of gray zone tactics in the years leading up to the 2022 invasion. These included the seizure of administrative buildings, propaganda and disinformation campaigns, material and financial support, and the mobilization of separatist militias with strong pro-Russian positions (Carment et al., 2019). The provision of weapons and ammunition allowed the separatists to acquire and hold territory and support their military operations against the official Ukrainian forces. Russia's gray zone tools and tactics in Eastern Ukraine have been successful because the Federation has utilized pre-existing ethnic divisions and grievances. Following years of successful grey zone operations, the Russian Federation recognized the Luhansk and Donetsk regions as independent states and placed Russian troops inside as 'peacekeepers' (Ahmed et al., 2022). Thus, breaching the territory of Ukraine and starting an armed conflict.

As a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its violation of international law, particularly the principles of state sovereignty and non-aggression, the European Union, the United States, and numerous other states have imposed economic sanctions and have condemned the actions of the Russian troops (Ahmed et al., 2022). Due to the integrated economies of the European Union and Russia, these sanctions have increased geopolitical tensions and have negatively impacted European economies, as well as the European stock market (Ahmed et al., 2022). In addition, the conflict in Ukraine is still ongoing and has caused thousands of casualties on both sides. The state of Ukraine has accused Russian forces of war crimes (Stefanelli, March 2022) and has instituted proceedings in the International Court of Justice against Russia by claiming genocidal intent (Stefanelli, Feb. 2022). Given the complex situation in Ukraine, the relationship between Russia and the European Union has been called into question. Although Ukraine is not an official member of the European Union, it has been granted candidate status.

Lawmakers have expressed concerns over Russian aggression and mistrust over the ability of the Federation to act as a moral and righteous partner of the European member states. These concerns are well founded and reasonable; however, in order to find solutions and end the military conflict, all sides involved would need to put aside differences, be prepared to negotiate, and undoubtedly make compromises. The underlying causes of the conflict are not one-dimensional, and Russia's aggressive foreign policy cannot be regarded as the sole origin of the problem. The driving factors of the Ukrainian crisis are multifaceted, and all involved sides hold responsibility to an extent. The crisis is the result of failed diplomacy and misaligned foreign policy objectives. Therefore, EU-Russia relations need to be restored, and peace, trust, and transparency ought to be fostered for a brighter future.

In Defense of EU-Russia Partnership in the International Sphere

Beneficial Outcomes

Given that both the European Union and the Russian Federation are major players in the international arena, both political entities have a tremendous impact on global security. Fostering friendly foreign relations and collaborating on security challenges are of prime importance. Not only will a strong partnership between the EU and Russia help mitigate the conflict in Ukraine and the geopolitical concerns over the expansion of NATO, but it will also produce beneficial outcomes in relation to transnational crime, terrorism, human and drug trafficking, etc. The two political entities share numerous global challenges, which require coordinated and collaborative responses. Furthermore, by cooperating on the resolution of global issues, the EU and Russia can foster trust and improve their overall relations (Pashentsev, 2019). By intertwining their policies on international challenges, the two political entities can create more common ground in knowing that there are shared issues that require immediate attention, rather than focus on their own ideological and political differences (Pashentsev, 2019).

Additionally, another beneficial outcome of a successful EU-Russia partnership includes the facilitation of economic cooperation (Tsygankov, 2019). To tie this section on international security back to the first section of the paper that addressed the economic relations, collaboration on transnational challenges (such as climate change, migration, energy security, etc.) provides opportunities for mutual economic gain (Tsygankov, 2019). Consequently, cooperation on these international security issues has the potential to create a platform for an enhanced economic relationship, which can foster even greater political cooperation. Arguing in favor of EU-Russia relations on international security during an ongoing military conflict between the Federation and Ukraine is a difficult task and the adverse situation should be acknowledged. However, advocating for the severing of relations between the European Union and Russia will only escalate the conflict and deepen the already- existing divide between the two sides. Instead, fostering cooperation on global issues and striving to maintain international security could provide an outlet for negotiations and could have a positive effect on the resolution of the Ukrainian crisis. In sum, international security cooperation and amiable foreign relations between the EU and Russia have the potential to mend existing conflicts, foster economic growth, and lead to shared responses to transnational issues.

To conclude this section, the analysis of the international security partnership between Russia and the European Union exemplifies the importance of improving diplomatic ties and employing peaceful means to resolve conflicts and disagreements. The review of the European foreign policy approach and the Russian foreign policy approach exemplifies the fundamental differences in worldview between the two actors. The examined security challenges, posed by the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the current conflict in Ukraine, undermine EU-Russia relations and serve as arguments for the severing of future relations due to irreconcilable differences. However, this section comes to the conclusion that continuing the relationship and fostering amiable foreign relations will provide more beneficial outcomes than ending the EU-

Russia partnership. The next section of the paper focuses on the aspect of regional stability and how it can be utilized to foster friendly foreign relations.

Regional Stability

Overview of EU-Russia Regional Relations

The third important aspect of the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation is the maintenance of regional stability and security. Regional relations in Europe are multi-faceted and complex and ought to be analyzed with respect to their historical origins and ideological nuances. Following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, new borders were drawn, and new countries were established from Former Soviet Union republics (Molodikova, 2017). As a result, approximately 25 million ethnic Russians became foreigners in these newly founded countries (Molodikova, 2017). Furthermore, numerous Baltic and Balkan states that were once part of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Bloc moved away from the Russian sphere of influence and toward the European Union. As previously discussed, the majority of the former Soviet republics and ex-Soviet Bloc states became members of the European Union and/or joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Russian Federation's loss of its satellite states and its influence in its near abroad region generated grievances and tensions between the Union and Moscow. These regions share deep historical, cultural, and socio- economic connections to Russia (Molodikova, 2017); therefore, the Federation has declared responsibility and interest through its assertive foreign policy initiatives. This section focuses on the significance of regional stability in EU-Russia relations and examines the challenges that Russia's policy toward its diaspora populations has essentially created. It concludes that the two political entities should prioritize maintaining a constructive relationship in relation to European regional security and outlines reasons in favor of EU-Russian cooperation and their beneficial consequences.

Russia's 'Compatriots Policy' and Grey Zone Conflict Tactics: Counterarguments to EU-Russia Regional Cooperation

The 'compatriots policy' of Russia can be identified as a diaspora strategy aimed at protecting the rights and interests of ethnic Russians living in former Soviet republics and other countries in its near abroad (Molodikova, 2017). The roots of this policy approach can be traced back to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the recognition of the sovereign status of former USSR republics (Maksimovtsova, 2017). During the creation of the new states, individuals from one ethnic group were merged with another dominant ethnic group that advocated for unity under the dominant language and culture; therefore, the minority ethnic group became socially and culturally excluded. These young nation-states were faced with severe economic and political dilemmas, as well as a significant influx of Russian-speaking migrants (Maksimovtsova, 2017). The 'compatriots policy' is based on the premise that ethnic Russians with historical and cultural ties to Russia ought to be able to maintain their cultural traditions, language, and national identity. Russia's interests in maintaining its influence over the former Soviet republics influenced the implementation of this strategic policy (Molodikova, 2017). Consequently, Russia has utilized the

social, economic, and cultural exclusion of Russians abroad to exercise influence over the political environment and provide support for the diaspora groups connected to Moscow under the pretext of violations of minority rights (Molodikova, 2017).

While Russia's 'compatriots policy' is primarily targeted towards the protection of the rights and interests of ethnic Russians abroad, the Federation has been criticized by the European Union for interfering in the domestic affairs of its member states and for implementing gray zone conflict tactics to exert political pressure (Mazzar, 2015). Critics claim that in its pursuit to dominate the near abroad space and undermine Western-led alliances, Russia has resorted to the use of gray zone conflict (Mazzar, 2015). This format of engagement with international adversaries relies on soft tools and covert tactics to influence. Examples include coercive diplomacy, economic pressure, sponsorship of militias, and even threats of energy sanctions (Mazzar, 2015). While this kind of conflict falls outside of the definition of war; it does not constitute peace either.

There are valid concerns regarding Russia's ability to lace its policies toward its diaspora populations with grey zone tactics. The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have all been subject to numerous gray zone tactics under the pretext of protecting minority populations. The Russian Federation has employed political warfare tactics in the Baltic region and Ukraine, most notably the organization of state agents to aggravate local grievances, the mobilization of ethnic minorities, and the use of disinformation and cyberspace operations to further local instabilities (Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2016). As a result, Russia's active undermining of regional stability has called into question the partnership between the European Union and Russia. Arguments in favor of breaking off future relations are centered on the notion that the Federation is not a transparent and trustworthy partner for the EU and actively works to undermine the sovereignty of European member states. While these concerns are reasonable, regional problems ought to be resolved through constructive cooperation between the two political entities. Ending amiable foreign relations would only deepen the existing rift and empower Russia to continue expanding its influence in the near abroad space.

In Defense of EU-Russia Regional Cooperation

Beneficial Outcomes

Collaboration between the European Union and the Russian Federation on regional stability is of prime importance in ensuring the maintenance of regional peace and security. Since the two political entities share a common neighborhood, they are largely affected by each other's regional developments and security problems (Makarychev and Sergunin, 2017). If the EU and Russia collaborate on the conduct of regional policies toward Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, many of the counterpoints discussed in the previous section will be mitigated. To tie this section back to the previous section on international security, the EU and Russia can collaborate on policies, such as environmental protection, economic development, and maritime security. Similar to international security, the two political entities are also responsible for the maintenance of regional security in their shared neighborhood (Makarychev and Sergunin, 2017). Notably, the European Union ought to establish all-encompassing protections for ethnic Russians

inside its member states and ensure that their cultural, national, and linguistic ties to Russia are respected. This would help mitigate some of the existing grievances and prevent the Federation from interfering to protect its diaspora populations under pretexts, real or perceived, of violations of minority rights. Additionally, given that the EU and the Russian Federation both contribute expertise and resources toward regional stability, the likelihood of regional crises and the escalation of current regional disputes would likely decrease significantly.

Furthermore, fostering a constructive EU-Russia partnership in relation to regional stability has the potential to contribute to the building of trust and improve social, cultural, and economic relations. The Ukrainian crisis has proved that regional stability and economic trade are interdependent and disruptions to one area have the potential to spread and affect all areas of bilateral cooperation between the EU and Russia. Regional collaboration can produce beneficial outcomes in the creation of jobs, enhanced economic development, and more transparent trade initiatives. Constructive dialogue and good-faith negotiations are essential for the maintenance of amiable foreign relations. It is important to note that cultural exchanges and increased investment in educational and cultural programs have the potential to promote mutual understanding between the EU and Russia (Pashentsev, 2019). Instead of severing relations and attempting to undermine each other's regional influence, the two political entities will greatly benefit from embracing their different approaches and focusing on the resolution of common regional challenges. In sum, given that the European Union and the Russian Federation will always share a neighborhood and have common boundaries, they ought to cooperate on regional security and reduce tensions and conflicts.

To conclude this section, the analysis of the regional stability partnership of the Russian Federation and the European Union exemplifies the importance of improving foreign policy relations and employing peaceful means to resolve conflicts and disagreements in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. The overview of Russia-EU regional relations depicts a comprehensive relationship of constant conflict and cooperation and portrays the importance of joint initiatives to counter regional challenges. European concerns regarding Russian interference in EU member states via the 'compatriots policy' and the utilization of gray zone tactics are well-grounded; however, these disagreements over foreign policy initiatives can be peacefully discussed in the appropriate international forums without the need for military escalations. This section on regional stability demonstrates the significance of the EU-Russia partnership and provides justification for the maintenance of a constructive and transparent collaboration between the two neighbors. The concluding section of the paper assembles a framework for navigating the complex relationship, discusses future implications, and addresses relevance to policymakers.

Concluding Remarks: Navigating the EU-Russia Relationship, Future Implications, Relevance

This research paper has examined the question of whether EU-Russia relations should be maintained by analyzing key areas of the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation. The three chief areas of economic and energy security, international security, and regional stability frame the nature of the EU-Russia partnership. Through examining each subject in depth and outlining beneficial consequences, this paper has come to the conclusion that the two political entities should prioritize maintaining a constructive relationship and amiable foreign relations. This conclusion answers the research question by constructing a comprehensive outline of US-Russia relations and exemplifying the importance of maintaining that relationship in the future. While acknowledging the existence of counterpoints and opposing views to this argument, this study asserts that such viewpoints have the potential to motivate the EU and Russia to resolve conflicts and reduce tensions by enhancing means of collaboration.

Instead of dwelling on the obstacles that hinder the partnership, the two political entities should prioritize transparency, cooperation, and trust. By doing so, all challenges will be resolved.

The three main sections of the paper not only advocate in favor of collaboration between the European Union and the Russian Federation but also provide the foundation for a comprehensive framework to navigate this complex relationship. The key areas of economic and energy security, international security, and regional stability are vital points of conflict and cooperation for the EU and Russia and must be studied individually and fully. By examining the complex relations of the EU and Russia on different levels of cooperation, policymakers can benefit from a better understanding of the partnership between the two entities. In turn, they can make informed decisions that lead to effective domestic and foreign policy initiatives. The research and data presented in this paper not only contribute to the understanding of policymakers of EU-Russia relations but also allow them to evaluate their policy options and craft more effective responses to emerging global challenges. Continued collaboration and open and transparent dialogue between the European Union and the Russian Federation are essential in addressing regional and global challenges and for the maintenance of international peace in the future. A successful and mutually beneficial relationship between the EU and Russia is a viable option and should be pursued in future policymaking endeavor.

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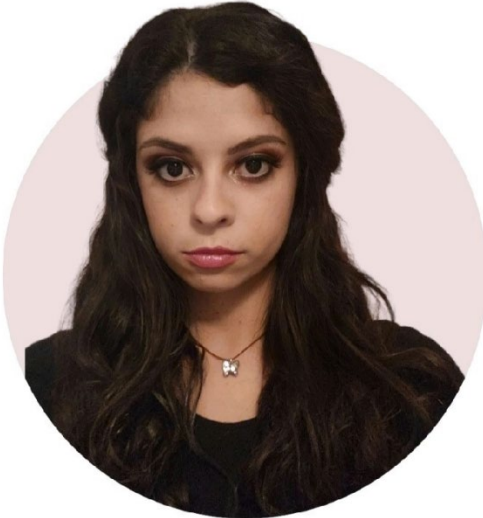
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ABOUT THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS RESEARCH LAB

Webster University's Global Policy Horizons Lab is a policy-focused research entity where students, Lab researchers, affiliated faculty, as well as members of the policy community from across disciplines, can explore national and global security issues, generate original research, as well as produce peer-reviewed policy papers and commentaries. The Lab pursues innovative research focusing on unconventional threats, identity and security, role of technology in security, economic security, as well environmental and food security. The goal of the Lab is to become a knowledge hub that informs national governments and other members of the global policy community on contemporary and future security challenges.

The current Director of the Lab is **Professor Dani Belo, PhD**.