

The Return to Europe and the Rise of EU-Russian Ideological Differences

By Maxime Henri André Larivé and Roger E. Kanet

The stones and concrete blocks of the Berlin Wall have long been distributed as souvenirs. But we should not forget that the fall of the Berlin Wall was possible thanks to a historic choice—one that was also made by our people, the people of Russia—a choice in favour of democracy, freedom, openness and a sincere partnership with all the members of the big European family.

Vladimir Putin, 43rd Munich Security Conference, 2007¹

“Indeed, little of value can be achieved without Russia, and almost nothing against it.”

EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana at the 44th Munich Security conference in 2008²

A rising European Union directly challenged a declining Russia as the end of the Cold War brought a new dimension to politics on the European continent. The decision by the EU at the end of the 1990s to implement its geopolitical ambitions on the European continent changed the power relations between Russia and the EU. Since the turn of the millennium, Russia has been more assertive in blocking European initiatives that threaten its perceived sphere of influence. The military intervention in Georgia, the cyberattack in Estonia and the rounds of energy cut-offs are examples of Moscow’s willingness directly to confront a declining West weakened since the collapse of the financial markets in 2008. Vladimir Putin’s rise as the head of Russia and the changing regional and international balances of power contributed to the build-up of a complex regional balance of power involving a wide range of actors with diverging perceptions, goals, and strategies. While the EU’s strategy to increase its security focuses on the projection of values, Russia’s approach emphasizes traditional power projections. This core difference between strategies created a deterioration in the relations between the EU and Russia in the last decade and has the potential to contribute to further regional instability.

At the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama famously spoke of the ‘end of history,’ meaning that no serious ideological competitors to liberal democracy

Maxime Henri André Larivé is a Jean Monnet Postdoctoral Fellow at the EU Center of Excellence and a Lecturer at the University of Miami. His research interests and publications focus on EU foreign and security policy.

Roger E. Kanet is Professor in the Department of International Studies of the University of Miami. He has published widely on issues related to Russian foreign and security policy.

remained.³ These ideological, political, and economic assumptions were to be proven wrong with the rise of powers such as Russia and China, which have focused on the development of state capitalism rather than democracy and liberal capitalism as a path to the future. As this article will demonstrate, the EU and Russia are and will be involved in various conflicts. However, the ideological clash will be the central issue and will lie at the foundation of other conflicts. In this period of the shifting balance of power, the EU-Russia relationship is in fact a regional case of the shifts in global politics and the ideological tensions associated with them.

This article examines several factors that may lead to conflict between the EU and Russia. First, the zones of tension between Russia and the EU are identified and discussed. Second, the article reviews the power and influence of each actor's perceptions in the making and shaping of their foreign policies. Finally, the article will discuss new forms of conflict—geopolitical, diplomatic, and military—that should be expected in this coming century.

IN THIS PERIOD OF THE SHIFTING BALANCE OF POWER, THE EU-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP IS IN FACT A REGIONAL CASE OF THE SHIFTS IN GLOBAL POLITICS AND THE IDEOLOGICAL TENSIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THEM.

ZONES OF TENSION

EU and NATO Enlargements

The enlargements of both the EU and NATO in the late 1990s and early 2000s brought members of the Euro-Atlantic community to the borders of Russia. Not only is the West growing closer to Russian borders, but it is also active in promoting its values and norms by sponsoring pro-democracy regimes in Ukraine and other countries throughout the region. Russia initially did not see EU enlargement as a direct threat to its sphere of influence or power. But simultaneous NATO enlargement not only affected relations with Russia; it has also interfered with EU enlargement and created confusion about the EU's objectives. The enlargements of both institutions were political and strategic by filling the power vacuum on the European continent following the collapse of the Soviet Union—a result that Moscow has viewed with increasing concern.

Until 2004 President Putin focused on trying to save Russia from total collapse through pragmatic domestic, economic, and foreign policy measures when engaging with the West. Yet the addition of ten new member states to the EU in 2004 signified a turning point in the EU-Russia relationship as the enlargement “underscored the EU policy of constructing a Europe without any meaningful role for Russia.”⁴ The enlargement goals of the EU and NATO were first, to consolidate political and economic reforms in the region and, second, to integrate Central European countries

into the institutions of the Euro-Atlantic community. Fifteen years after the initial extension of NATO, the issue remains a critical topic in Russian circles. In an address in 2007, Vladimir Putin underlined the point when he said,

*"I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?"*⁵

While NATO membership offered protection against a resurgent Russia, EU membership offered a valuable economic prize. Yet both organizational enlargements began to threaten Russia's perceived dominance in the region.

Neighborhood versus Sphere of Influence

Russia and the EU do not agree on the relevance of Eastern and Central European states in European affairs. Russia sees the region as part of its sphere of influence, but the EU views these states as part of the neighborhood, which allows for freedom of action within tentative institutional frameworks. During the tumultuous period of the 1990s, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) regulated EU-Russian relations around an array of domains. Several years later, in 2003, the relationship was organized around four *common spaces*: a Common Economic Space; a Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice; a Common Space of Cooperation in the Field of External Security; and a Common Space on Research, Education and Culture. Despite the establishment of institutional frameworks, the relationship became paradoxical. Fernandes and Simão noted:

*"On the one hand, the method and the domains of cooperation are quite advanced, whereas, on the other hand, the quality of the political relationship has deteriorated and the partners have not been able to create a real strategic partnership."*⁶

The EU implemented two strategies in dealing with the shared neighborhoods. The first strategy included the enlargement plans of 2004 and 2007. At first the costs of these former Soviet countries joining a new Union were considered minimal; however, the benefits of the enlargement are still very much debated in Western Europe. The second strategy is the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) first outlined by the Commission in the 2003 report on a Wider Europe.⁷ The ENP is a bilateral agreement with partner countries and expanded regional initiatives, such as the creation of the Eastern Partnership, which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. This privileged relationship between the EU and partner countries is central in promoting common values and norms such as the rule of law, good governance, and market economy. As expressed by the High Representative Catherine Ashton during the latest Eastern Partnership meeting in July 2012, "We [the EU] are determined to support on-going transformation of partners toward sustainable democracies."⁸ Such partnerships in Russia's perceived sphere of influence has also created tension; however, Russia still has incentives and influences on the elites of these countries.

The Color Revolutions

The pro-Western movements taking place in Ukraine, Georgia and the Central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of the 21st century raised red flags in Moscow. The EU and the United States were widely supportive of Ukraine and Georgia as both countries sought membership with the EU and NATO respectively. The period of the ‘Color Revolutions’ in 2003 and 2004 – the ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia followed by the ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine – had a considerable impact on Russia. In the view of the head of the European Council on Foreign Relations, “The Russian elite was plunged into deep depression about Russia’s declining influence in its ‘near abroad’.”⁹

In 2003 the US under President George W. Bush applied its regime change strategy of spreading freedom and democracy to Georgia by backing the opposition to the old regime during the Rose Revolution. A year later, while the US and the EU supported the opposition for the Ukrainian presidential election, Moscow supported the ruling regime’s candidate. These two scenarios of Western political involvement in post-Soviet space were perceived as interference and a direct threat to Russia’s sphere of influence.

Not only were the Color Revolutions a threat to Russia’s sphere of influence, but they were also considered a possible menace to the political model of the emerging Russian leadership. A successful revolution in Ukraine or Georgia could have possibly spilled over to Russia in the same way that the 2011 Arab revolutions have spread throughout the Arab world. As then Prime Minister Putin noted:

As far as ‘color revolutions’ are concerned, I think that everything is clear. It is a well-tested scheme for destabilizing society. I do not think it appeared by itself We know the events of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. . . . They are now transferring this practice to Russian soil in a natural manner.”¹⁰

Over the course of the next five years, Russia worked to reverse the impact of the Color Revolutions.¹¹ Although defeat in the military confrontation between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 did not bring down the government of Mikheil Saakashvili, plans for possible membership in NATO were put on indefinite hold. In Ukraine, the deep divisions within the Orange coalition greatly undermined the reform movement and facilitated the return of the Russian-oriented party to power in early 2010. The longstanding Russian economic pressures, including the gas wars of both 2006 and 2009, along with the 2008 Russian military intervention in Georgia contributed to the electoral victory of the Russian-oriented forces in the country. Finally, the overthrow of the Bakiyev government in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 ended the impact of the Color Revolutions in post-Soviet territory.¹²

Although the three Color Revolutions evolved in quite different ways, Moscow initially faced opposition in each revolution. In response, the Russian leadership employed a variety of means – economic blackmail, outright military intervention, expanded economic assistance, and direct support for a coup in Kyrgyzstan – in order to achieve its objectives. The consequences of the Rose and Orange

Revolutions ranged from the slow and limited integration of Ukraine into the Euro-Atlantic community structures and a slowdown of the entire transition process for the region.

TWO ACTORS, TWO MODELS, ONE CONTINENT

Since the turn of the 21st century, Russia and the EU have evolved quite differently and increasingly at odds with one another on both the international and regional stage. Both actors are neighbors, but their foreign policies considerably diverge due to differences in perceived roles and interests. The EU has been labeled a ‘postmodern’ actor¹³ — an entity beyond the traditional nation-state — while Russia functions as a “traditional” Westphalian state, or a 19th century power.¹⁴ These ideological and political dichotomies create the foundation for a complex relationship. The chart below offers a summary of the argument developed throughout this section.

Chart 1: Power and roles of the perceptions on the EU-Russia relationship¹⁵

Perceptions	EU of Russia	Russia of EU
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • double standard • lack of trust • zero sum thinking • power maneuvering in order to achieve its interests • neighbor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic actor • no single position on the EU & European security • evolves as a function of self perception of its role • competitor • containment through enlargement
	EU self perception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • normative/civilian power • soft power 	Russia self perception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Power • Great Power Pragmatism (Tsygankov)
Foreign Policies	EU	Russia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage Russia • contain Russia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pragmatic • revisionist
Models	EU	Russia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • liberal democracy • post-modern entity • soft power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • authoritarian/sovereign democracy • traditional Westphalian state • hard power
Problems	EU	Russia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high dependency on Russian hydrocarbons • no common voice & policy stance • divergent interests by Member States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dependency on EU hydrocarbon market • EU interference in Russia's sphere of influence
Strategies	EU	Russia
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encircle Russia in a network of institutions • develop a set of rules & values based on the rule of law • decrease in military spending • multilateral agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'divide & rule' tactic • increase of military spending • push its influence in Central Asia and the CIS

Sources: Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, “A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations,” European Council on Foreign Relations (2007); Andrei P. Tsygankov, New Challenges for Putin’s Foreign Policy,” Orbis (2006); Steve Marsh & Wyn Rees. The European Union in the Security of Europe. From Cold War to Terror War. (New York: Routledge, 2012)

Russian Foreign Policy

The formation of modern-day Russia occurred during the last decade of the 20th century. Economic turmoil in 1998, widespread corruption, weak institutions, and the dependence on Western funds contributed to the desire to re-empower and resurrect a Russian grandeur reminiscent of the Tsars and the Soviet Union. A new triad of Russian national values – “sovereign democracy, robust economy and military power” – was promoted by the former Russian defense minister, Sergei Ivanov, in 2006.¹⁶ The emphasis on the rejuvenation of Russian hard power has been a central piece in the making of the new Russian grandeur. This new policy focus was revealed in a revised defense doctrine and an emphasis on the modernization of the Russian military. The modernization process, which took place in the post-Georgia war period, included the transformation of the ground forces, air force, navy, defense industry, and the nuclear arsenal.¹⁷

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Since the emergence of Vladimir Putin as the head of Russian politics in 1999, the dynamics of Russian foreign policy clearly shifted from the chaos of the 1990s to the creation of a new model of sovereign democracy.¹⁸ Putin engaged rebuilding the *greatness of Russia* through two priorities: first, transforming and stabilizing the state; second, bringing back the influence and respect of Russia as a Great Power on the international stage.¹⁹ Because Putin regarded Gorbachev as ineffective in his international relations, he ultimately learned to avoid making too many concessions to the West. Furthermore, Russia’s foreign policy is founded upon the perception that the West has gained major geostrategic advantages following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin believes that the US and the EU changed the rules of the game.²⁰ He concluded that the West could ignore Russia’s opinions on NATO and EU enlargements—in addition to ignoring Russia’s objections on issues like intervention in Kosovo, military bases in Europe, and US-sponsored missile shields—because Russia was considered weak.

A clear indication of Russia’s new assertive and largely unilateral approach to dealing with the West occurred during the 43rd Munich Security Conference in 2007. In a speech on an international stage, President Putin emphasized the revisionist nature of Russian foreign policy when he discussed the persistence of Cold War thinking in the West. He noted that “the unipolar world that had been proposed after the Cold War did not take place either.”²¹ In other words, he charged the United States with the attempt to totally dominate the post-Cold War world as had been the case with US hegemony since the early 1990s.²² This statement added to his assertion

two years earlier that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.

Russia's resurgence is occurring at a time when the dominant power of the United States has eroded due to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the fact that the EU is going through a period of economic crisis. In dealing with the EU, Moscow successfully used the "divide-and-rule" strategy by interacting with individual member states rather than with the Union as a whole. Moscow exploited the lack of unity and promoted bilateral relations with each European capital.²³ As Putin's foreign policy became more pragmatic and less ideological, further confrontations occurred with the policies of the West. Russian nationalism is the heart and soul of Russian foreign policy and it has fueled Putin's ambition to become once again a Great Power.²⁴ In the words of the neoconservative analyst Robert Kagan, "great power nationalism has returned to Russia and with it traditional great power calculations and ambitions."²⁵

A postmodern entity for a postmodern foreign policy?

The European Union is very different from Russia. On complex and vital issues, such as a diplomatic relationship with Russia, the making of a unified foreign policy for the Union is quite impossible. While Putin may be able to shape a vision and policy for Russia with his close advisors, the EU faces greater complexity in organizing the decision-making of twenty-seven member states. Before looking at the foreign policy position of the EU, one must agree on the nature of the entity itself. In the current essay, the EU is conceived of and interpreted, in the words of Robert Cooper, as a postmodern state. A postmodern state can be defined as an entity beyond the traditional nation-state, which binds itself by international law, has supranational institutions, and pools sovereignty. In order to increase its security without over-militarizing its Union, the best strategy for the EU is to widen its territory. Subsequently, the EU policy of enlargement was permitted and facilitated by several factors including the US military umbrella, the power vacuum initiated by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the extensive soft power offered by EU's attractive common market.

The EU approaches relations with Russia in two ways: contain and engage. The two waves of enlargement in 2004 and 2007 were examples of the strategy of containment through the expansion of the EU's values and norms throughout the region. The EU's approach to engaging Russia has been to seek and develop a complex web of institutional agreements. The goal of this institutionalized relationship is to "persuade Russia to adopt the model that Europeans have developed to manage their own affairs."²⁶ This strategy was possible when Russia was a weaker state, yet after the arrival of Putin to power, the EU has faced more difficulties in forcing Russia to embrace a highly institutionalized relationship. The most obvious example of Russia's avoidance of signing any type of sticky agreements with the EU is the PCA. The PCA came into force in 1997 for a ten-year period, yet the recurring inability of the parties to finalize a new agreement that

extends beyond 2007 created an annual automatic extension of the old agreement. Since 2008, the EU and Russia have been designing a new agreement based on the PCA framework. The process has been very lengthy because both actors envision very different types of agreement. Russia seeks a “brief framework agreement supplemented by a system of sectoral agreements, while the EU aims at a comprehensive agreement based on common values.”²⁷

Relations with Moscow have also become increasingly difficult for the EU due to the lack of unity among the twenty-seven member states in their relations with Russia. Member states— especially France, Germany and Italy—negatively impacted the shaping of a common European approach toward Russia. When studying the lack of unity of the EU, Leonard and Popescu argued that EU Member States can be grouped into five categories when dealing with Russia:²⁸



Source: Leonard & Popescu, “A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations,” ECFR, (2007), 2.

- Trojan Horses (represent Russia’s positions inside the EU): Greece and Cyprus
- Strategic Partners (strong political and economic bilateral relations with Russia): France, Germany, Italy and Spain
- Friendly Pragmatists (tend to oppose actions that might irritate Moscow): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia and Portugal.
- Frosty Pragmatists (willing to challenge Russia when it violates their commercial interests and diplomatic norms): Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands, Romania, Sweden and the UK

- New Cold Warriors (trying to shape a more critical EU line towards Russia): Poland and Lithuania

Independent of these groups, the EU also has a different approach and perspective in interacting with Russia. This classification of the member states illustrates the difficulty for the EU to develop a unified and common voice in dealing with Russia.

TYPES OF CONFLICTS

Even though the relations between the EU and Russia are not on the brink of collapse, it is probable that coming decades will see the rise of a series of conflicts and tensions between the two. Potential conflicts can be grouped into three categories: geopolitical, military, and diplomatic.

Geopolitical

Since Putin's rise to power, Russia's foreign policy has been extremely revisionist, taking into consideration its military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and the use of energy as a weapon against Ukraine in 2006 and 2009.²⁹ These examples are part of the overall strategy to reassert Russia's interests into the politics of other post-Soviet states.³⁰ As Fernandes and Simão have noted, "one of the main factors that has permitted this has been its economic performance and the income from energy production and exports."³¹ During his first two terms in the presidency, Putin sought to rebuild Moscow's lost empire by first controlling energy resources and then seeking regional economic domination.³² The 2006 crisis between Ukraine and Russia was a wake-up call for Europeans and pushed the issue of energy security to the top of the national and European agendas. The President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, declared that,

"The fact is that energy was, until recently, a forgotten subject in the European agenda. Now it is back at the heart of European integration, where it began with the creation of the Coal and Steel community, and the EURATOM Treaty. And where it belongs."³³

The second gas war during the winter of 2009 started with Russia's accusation that Ukraine was stealing Russian gas. By early January 2009, after rounds of accusation between Moscow and Kiev, several EU member states—Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece—suffered a total halt of their energy supplies. Similarly, the invasion of Georgia in 2008 threatened the politics of energy diversification of the EU. The game of diversification has not been properly played by the EU and its Member States as Russia's companies, notably Gazprom, own the majority of the pipelines like North Stream and South Stream. This decision by the EU to diversify its energy resources began after the crises of 2006 and 2009.

One alternative to limiting energy dependence on Russia is to diversify the EU's energy sources. France, Germany and Italy have been the most active in pursuing this approach. However, the transport of gas from African nations, such as Nigeria, to Europe via pipelines is not possible, with the costly exception of shipping liquefied

gas. In the case of Europe, gas flows directly from Russia via underwater or above-ground pipelines. Since gas comes from long distances and transits through various countries, pipelines can be used as a political weapon in the hands of Russia, as well as by the transit states like Ukraine.³⁴ Energy interdependence is a considerable problem for the EU and its Member States. Russia has vast natural resources of hydrocarbons principally sent to Western Europe where the EU can offer a stable market for these energy exports. Even though the relationship has been described as a typical example of interdependence, the Russians believe they are in the driver's seat.

The second approach pursued by Russia does not belong to its conventional *realpolitik* arsenal, but is quite similar to the EU's approach of building institutions. The latest element of Putin's foreign policy strengthened the regional leverage of Russia through the Eurasian Union. The Eurasian Union is for the moment a movement toward economic cooperation among former Soviet states without democratic conditionality.³⁵ The Eurasian Union stands as a tool with which to confront the West, and especially the EU, in its own game of institutionalized cooperation. It is a way to increase and anchor the position of Russia in the post-Soviet region. As Neil Buckley of the Financial Times describes,

*"There is a deep irony here. The west risks 'losing' former Soviet republics just as it is trying to nurture democracy in the Arab world after uprisings often compared with eastern Europe's 20 years ago and partly inspired by the post-Soviet 'colored' revolutions."*³⁶

The test case of the Eurasian Union hinges upon the decision by Ukraine, once close to the Euro-Atlantic structures. Even though Kiev has rejected the invitation, which would undercut its commitments to the EU, Moscow is still trying to convince its neighbor to join its Union.

Putin has attempted to strengthen Russia's position in post-Soviet space by promoting economic and security integration. The Eurasian Union stands in the middle of a mix of new initiatives such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Single Economic Space, all gravitating around Russia. According to Jeffrey Mankoff, this series of integration initiatives bring a new threat of "deepening dependence of neighboring countries on Russia that could compromise not only development but also foreign-policy autonomy."³⁷ This economic bloc at the borders of another economic power could be at the heart of considerable tensions and competition for regional hegemony.

Military

The military invasion of Georgia during the summer of 2008 represents the first example of the "traditional" form of military engagement that could occur in the future. The Rose Revolution of 2003, the pressure to include Georgia in NATO, and the strategic energy location of the country contributed to Russia's decision to invade Georgia. This invasion represented not only an international crisis, but also a European crisis, which directly challenged the unity of the EU. An effective

diplomatic strategy for the crisis seemed unclear, and French President Sarkozy, holder of the EU Presidency at the time, was at the forefront of negotiating a ceasefire. The EU ultimately deployed a Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) mission and the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to supervise the peace process. Russia's invasion of Georgia sent several messages to the EU. First, Russia considers the area surrounding its borders as its direct sphere of influence; second, Russia will use force in order to maintain and increase its power; third, coming to the aid of small countries might involve the members of the Euro-Atlantic community risking their stability and resources; and, fourth, the EU was unable respond as a bloc.

The second type of possible military conflict is a cyberattack similar to the attack against Estonia in 2007. The cyberattacks shut down government offices, banks, political parties, private companies, and newspapers' websites. This incident created a precedent for cyber warfare between states and subsequently raised a core question: is a cyberattack a clear military action?³⁸ Since this use of cyber warfare against Estonia, several other countries have experienced constant cyberattack. In the case of the Euro-Atlantic community, Estonia has been the main engine in advancing the question of cyberdefense in the EU. Both traditional military measures and cybersphere security will be crucial in the future of states' defense plans.

Diplomatic

Finally, the diplomatic sphere is a main arena of disagreement and opposition between Russia and the European Union. With Russia, Britain, and France as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), most of the tensions happen on the international diplomatic stage. To deal with the most pressing international crises, all roads lead to Moscow. Moscow not only knows this, but also uses its veto power to advance its interests

and most importantly establish itself as a Great Power. The Iranian and Syrian conflicts cannot be solved without Russian involvement and support, but the EU and Russia continue to drift apart on core questions of security and peace in reference to these two crises. With the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) resolution in 2005 by the UN, Russia is concerned about the possible violation of national sovereignty in the name of human rights and democracy in order to promote regime change. The Western operation in Libya, backed by UNSC Resolution 1973, was viewed by Russia as a tool to promote regime change in the region—much like the previously discussed Color Revolutions in post-Soviet space.

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Since Libya, Russia has been opposed to any type of UN operations in the region, especially in Syria. The Iranian and Syrian cases are not only important security questions facing the EU and Russia, but they reflect the growing clash between different political models: sovereign-authoritarian democracy (Russia and China) and liberal democracy (US and the EU). These diplomatic tensions are simply disastrous for world peace and stability and will result in future conflict.

CONCLUSION

Two world powers, the European Union and Russia, share one continent. As Javier Solana has said, “It is sometimes easier to be global strategic partners than to be good neighbors.”³⁹ One of the core differences between the EU and Russia concerns the status of their relationship: the EU seeks to have good relations with a *neighbor*, while Russia perceives the EU as a *competitor*.

The competition and tensions between the European Union and Russia will continue to exist and possibly increase in the future. This article argues that a direct military conflict between EU Member States and Russia seems improbable, considering the degree of interdependence between both sides. Nevertheless, tensions between the two poles should be categorized and prioritized along the three categories identified: geopolitical, military, and diplomatic. Russia pursues its foreign policy using a range of military, economic and political tools with one objective: the return to greatness of the Russian state. However, the EU, in this period of internal and economic crises, has been unable to interact effectively with Russia. The apparent inability for the EU to speak the same political language and share values with Russia demonstrates the need for a change in the EU’s strategies and approaches. First, the EU will not be able to institutionalize its relations with Russia and must consider abandoning this aspect of its strategy. Second, as long as EU Member States do not agree on a single position in dealing with Russia, Russia will have the upper hand.

The Cold War partly stemmed from ideological differences between the US and the Soviet Union. Early in the 21st century, it appears that the most likely type of conflict between the EU and Russia will be ideological, based on values associated with a postmodern society versus the authoritarian aspects of so-called “sovereign democracy.”⁴⁰ Russia and the EU are clear representations of two viable, but crisis prone, models—liberal democracy versus capitalist authoritarianism. As illustrated by the enlargement of the EU and the expansion of NATO, the West’s strategy of increasing its security was to project its values through attraction rather than coercion, a strategy in opposition to Putin’s projection of Russian power. The soft power of the EU was a considerable asset in promoting democratic values throughout the continent. However, with the current economic crisis, the EU’s soft power is not only eroding, but it is also losing its hard power to defend the voluntary empire. Unfortunately, the EU as a post-modern actor is unprepared and unable to play the traditional game of power politics. Russia knows this and will continue to use the EU’s weakness to promote its powerful agenda both regionally and

internationally.

Notes

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