

Is there a russia eu strategic partnership



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The EU-Russia relationship is a difficult but incredibly important one. Russia is too big to integrate and too close to ignore (Marsh and Mackenstein 2005: 202). There is whether the forced interaction between Russia and the EU is a strategic partnership or just a variety of co-operation for mutual benefit.

Shortly before the twelfth Russian-European Union summit in early November 2003, in an interview with the Italian press, Russian president Vladimir Putin stated, “ For us, Europe is a major trade and economic partner and our natural, most important partner, including in the political sphere.

Russia is not located on the American continent, after all, but in Europe.”

Russia, he continued, is “ interested in developing relations with our partners in the U. S. and the American continent as a whole and in Asia, but, of course, above all with Europe” (Lynch. 2004: 100). This is all well and good, but as this essay will show, although there are areas where the EU and Russia are linked, through energy supply for example, there also areas where the two camps differ massively.

An example of this is their opposing views on humanitarian intervention which makes joint military operations on this issue impossible due to the Russians position of non-intervention. There are ultimately areas where the EU and Russia have what can only be described as strategic partnerships due to the nature of the dealings. The EU is Russia’s largest and most important trading partner, as the EU makes up 52% of Russia exports (Senokosov Y. and Skidelsky E. 2002, 4). The most important of all the trade is energy.

In 1999, 21% of the EU's oil came from Russia and 41% of the EU's gas was supplied by Russia (Lynch. 2004: 108). The European market is equally significant for Russia: in 1999, 53% of Russia's oil exports went to the EU; in 2000, 63% of Russia's natural gas exports were supplied to European markets (Senokosov Y. and Skidelsky E. 2002, 8). The European Commission have printed figures that state in terms of overall trade, member countries accounted for nearly 25%, amounting to £20 billion of Russia's imports and some 35% or £45 billion of Russia's exports (European Commission.

2007: 3). This scale of trade shows there is a strategic partnership in place, but that it is unbalanced. Russia's share of EU external trade in 2000 consisted of 4.4% of imports and a mere 2.1% of exports.

What is clear is that there is a partnership, but an unequal one that benefits the EU in terms of energy supplies but Russia in terms of overall income. After the EU's enlargement in May 2004, Russia will border on five EU member states, four of which are new members and will share a frontier some 2,200 kilometres long with EU countries (Dinan. 2004: 310). The enlarged EU will also surround Russia's Kaliningrad region, an exclave of some 900,000 people. The EU and Russia therefore will have to work together in a strategic partnership for the welfare of Kaliningrad, making the two powers become closer neighbours than ever before. The main Russian policy towards the EU was set out in a document entitled "The Medium-Term Strategy for the Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the EU (2000-2010)," published in 1999 and presented to Brussels in October of that year by then-Prime Minister Putin.

In line with the 1999 strategy's premise of engaging the EU without joining it, Russia seeks to a united Europe through the creation of four common spaces with the EU, to which Brussels officially agreed at the May 2003 EU-Russian summit in St. Petersburg (Johnson D. and Robinson P. 2005, 113).

These common spaces are a sign of how the EU and Russia are looking to further a strategic partnership (Dinan. 2005: 535). The first was a common European economic space which would concentrate on developing a more open and integrated market between Russia and the EU. The aim is to bring down barriers to trade and investment and promote reforms and competitiveness, based on the principles of non-discrimination, transparency and good governance. There will be greater co-operation on various issues that affect both parties such as energy, but will also deal with Russia's implementing of the Kyoto Protocol (European Commission. 2007: 6).

The second is a common space of freedom, security, and justice. Along with visa free travel through the 2005 Readmission Agreements, the aim is to have a greater co-operation and joint efforts in tackling world issues such as terrorism and other forms of trans-national illegal activities such as money laundering, the fight against drugs and human trafficking. However, the highlight is the EU's involvement in Russia's judicial reforms to bring them more in line with Western Europe (European Commission. 2007: 6). The third is a common space for research and education.

The EU and Russia have signed a number of agreements allowing Russia access to EU educational exchange programs. This common space is seen as a sign in Russia of the EU's recognition of the shared cultural and historical

heritage of Russia and Europe. This is a huge partnership between the EU and Russia and one of the most successful in terms of de facto improvement between Russo-EU relations (European Commission. 2007: 6).

The fourth is a common space on external security. The EU and Russia have agreed to work towards co-operation in international relations and crisis management, including the maintenance of peace and stability in the Balkans and cooperation in the Quartet to advance settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Lynch. 2004: 108). This is one area where the EU-Russian co-operation is faltering and shows that policy making isn't always a concrete way to build a strategic partnership (Marsh and Mackenstein.

2005: 203). There are ways in which there is no strategic partnership.

Moscow's insistence on retaining full sovereignty over its internal affairs has changed little, meaning that actual change brought about by these common spaces and agreements don't always deliver as much as they set out to. In EU-Russian relations, accommodation must be found based not on rhetorical declarations of partnership but on practical cooperation, especially in security dialogue (Johnson D.

and Robinson P. 2005: 115). In subsequent statements, Putin has made the limits of Russia's horizon clear: " We do not at present set [ourselves] the task of becoming a member of the EU ...

but we must seek to dramatically improve the effectiveness of cooperation and its quality" (Putin. 22/06/2003). The strategy establishes the yardstick for relations with the EU as " ensuring national interests" and asserts Russia's right to protect sectors of its economy, even if doing so contradicts

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the terms of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (the treaty regulating EU-Russian relations that came into force in 1997)¹¹ or hinders negotiations on accession to the World Trade Organization. In sum, the strategy enshrines Russia's refusal to allow Brussels to interfere in its sovereign affairs. An area of obvious non partnership is the difference between Russian and the EU's approach to foreign affairs, such as Russia involvement in Chechnya.

. The European Council " on the subject at its meeting in Helsinki in December not only condemned the bombardment of Chechen cities but also called for a review of the Common Strategy". (Johnson and Robinson. 2005: 117). As a result the EU cut Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) to Russia by £40 million from 1999 to 2000. This is an example of how the EU-Russo partnership is less a strategic one and seems only to work when both sides are already in agreement and both gain from it.

Russian has a staunch defence of what it names as its ' spheres of influence', which only adds to the problem of joint, co-operative and military intervention, especially when Russia is opposed to such action in the first place (Marsh and Mackenstein. 2005: 201). This sensitivity was shown in the Kosovo War when a Russian military unit from Bosnia rushed to take control of Pristina airport before NATO could get there. The Russian's obvious unease with NATO and the EU's close links with it make any joint military action in the southern Caucasus, which is what the EU high representative for CFSP, Solana advocates not only unlikely but demonstrates how a

strategic defence partnership is still a long way off (Marsh and Mackenstein. 2005: 201).

In judgement, the former Russian president failed to craft the oft-declared strategic partnership. Despite an impressive array of declarations and speeches about the importance of relations with Russia, the EU has devoted little time to this policy area. Instead, enlargement to 25, and then 27 member states and the drafting of a constitution have preoccupied the Europeans (Lynch. 2004: 103). Russian- EU relations remain troubled (Dinan. 2005: 454). Instead of a complete strategic partnership there are certain areas of co-operation, in economics through energy, in education and research, and to a small extent, co-operation in terrorism and drug trafficking for example. However for a full and real strategic partnership to thrive co-operation on defence needs to happen. A promising starting point would be a joint peacekeeping operation to support the settlement of the conflict in Moldova. Situated in the borderland between an enlarged EU and the Russian Federation, Moldova weaves together the interests and influence of the EU and Russia. Accommodating each other's interests and working together in Moldova can help start to develop a genuine strategic partnership between Moscow and Brussels.