

# **EU-RUSSIA: COMPONENTS FOR A STRATEGIC RESET \***

Coordinated by  
MEPs Sergey Lagodinsky and Reinhard Bütikofer

\* This paper was adopted on 12 May 2021 by the Group.  
It was endorsed without EFA participation.



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It is time to reassess the EU relationship vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. Recent months have demonstrated that our Russia strategy needs a strategic reset. The following components for a new strategy are informed by the reality of a deepening antagonism between the EU and Russia, but are also carried by a vision for bilateral renewal, albeit following a long dry spell in mutual relations that we have to get through.

## I. EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS

### a. Changing Expectations

Over the span of the past thirty years, we have experienced two phases in our bilateral expectations and are struggling with the third one:

In the first **phase of rapprochement**, following the end of the Cold War, both Russia and its European partners felt united by a joint vision of future convergence between Russia and the EU, a perspective of a common future of countries firmly anchored in international law and the values of constitutional democracy.

This hopeful vision declined and, starting in 2007, we entered the **phase of last hope**: Putin made harsh accusations against the West at the 2007 Munich Security Conference implying that we were on the brink of a new Cold War. Such rhetoric, as well as anti-democratic setbacks in Russia and its aggressive actions in Chechnya and the South Caucasus, have gravely damaged the trust. Yet there was still hope that Russia might return to the path of convergence through either more engagement or more pressure.

Though deeply damaged, this hope survived Russia's occupation of Georgia in 2008. It has, however, been depleted and ultimately destroyed during Putin's third term as President as a result of domestic repressions, aggressive policy in Syria, Libya, CAR, and other conflicts, and the 2014 Crimean occupation and war in Ukraine, as well as ongoing acts of intimidation towards Eastern Partnership countries and EU Member States. The latter challenge national, regional, and international security, peace and stability, and therefore EU interests. The EU was furthermore disenchanted by the assassinations of Russian government critics in the United Kingdom and Germany, and Russian cybercrime attacks in Europe and the United States. The current **phase of disillusionment** set in. Putin has positioned his country as an adversary to the EU. The EU had to admit that Russia had ceased to be a strategic partner and would not become one for the foreseeable future. Not as long as it refuses to abandon its policy of aggression. The mutual confidence has vanished.

There is no chance that Russia will be integrated into the Euro-Atlantic community of values in the foreseeable future. For the Russian government to respect even the minimum standards of international law and human rights seems unattainable at this point. Instead, the prospect of Russia joining forces with China in dismantling such standards by means of authoritarian great power games seems increasingly realistic.

## **b. Key objective and strategic goals**

This change of expectations leads to a re-evaluation of our key long-time objectives and strategic goals.

*Our overarching key objective is to shape relations with the Russian Federation in such a way that peace, stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries in the EU and in the EU neighbourhood are preserved, international law is respected, human rights and the rule of law remain our guiding principles, and the possibility remains for collaborating to solve common problems. In other words, the task is to defend the post-Cold War European peace architecture as enshrined in the Paris Charter.*

To achieve this objective, we need to focus on the following strategic goals of European policy towards Russia:

- Maintaining dialogue wherever possible;
- Strengthening relations with Russian civil society;
- Strengthening European resilience to hybrid and other interventions;
- Weakening the influence of corrupt Russian elites, ending their undesirable investments and avoiding cooperation with them;
- Reducing strategic dependence on Russia in various areas, especially in the energy sector;
- Pushing back Russia's geopolitical ambitions, in particular raising costs for military actions in third countries, including actions by proxies and mercenaries;
- Engaging in negotiations on nuclear disarmament, arms reduction and arms control aiming at reducing nuclear detonation risk for the European continent;
- Cooperating with Russia selectively and without compromising third party interests and human rights.

These principles lead directly to the components of our Russia strategy, described in this paper.

## II. KEY COMPONENTS FOR EU STRATEGY ON RUSSIA

### a. **Our policy seeks partnership with the Russian people and is thus pro-Russian**

Support for the people of Russia, their rights and Russian civil society are at the epicentre of our bilateral relationship. We want to provide as many Russian citizens as possible with direct and propaganda-free access to information about the European Union and its Member States. We want to intensify direct contacts between Russians and EU citizens, including lowering visa barriers. We need a campaign to broaden school, university and cultural exchange programs, as well as exchange in and improved access to vocational training and the non-academic sphere. Direct recruitment opportunities for both high-skill and low-skill workers from Russia should be created or strengthened.

EU countries must create and widen alternatives for politically motivated immigrants from Russia to be able to live in Europe under safe and legally certain conditions. As in similar situations for people from other countries (like Turkey), we need more residency options other than asylum-status, including options that provide an opportunity to stay and work in Europe without cutting connections to their homeland, family and Russian civil society. We must be prepared for the fact that after opening the borders in a post-COVID era, a great number of people who are tired of the oppressive situation in Russia or targeted by new repressive waves will look for opportunities to flee to Europe.

We endeavour to support fundamental human rights including the championing of gender equality, LGBTI rights and minority rights. The EU will, wherever possible, help oppressed citizens in Russia, especially those who face discrimination on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, linguistic or social group or sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, sex characteristics, or any other grounds.

Our engagement with Russia has to go beyond treating the political elite as the sole political actor in the country. An increased emphasis on engagement with the Russian regions might open the door to more independent cooperation with regional and local actors.

### b. **Support for active civil society remains the cornerstone of our policy**

The basic principle of our foreign policy is solidarity with and support for a free civil society worldwide. For years, systematic attacks on free spaces of Russian democratic-oriented civil society have been taking place. At the same time, large parts of the population are being deliberately depoliticised, and the

Russian government has created a parallel civil society that serves purely charitable purposes or promotes the government's interests. Openly taking a stance on social and political issues is stigmatized or even punished within educational institutions, the scientific community, and other public groups and organizations - even private companies. This creates an atmosphere in which political engagement is dangerous for anybody, particularly for students and employees who might lose their student status or job.

Our goal is to *enable members of civil society* to decide freely on their political orientation and to support their activities as much as we can. For us, a strong socio-political positioning of a citizen or an organization is not a shortcoming and not a reason for persecution or regulation, as is currently propagated in the Russian Federation, but an integral part of inherent human rights. Thus, we aim to further *strengthen financial and non-material support* for civil society and find ways to enable a repression-free reception of this aid, despite the current difficulties in cooperation with civil society, given all the mentioned obstacles and recent laws, such as the "foreign agents law". Beyond financial support, we must speak up on behalf of European and Russian NGOs and organisations targeted under the foreign agents law or the Russian undesirable organizations law and reject their defamatory labelling and discrimination. This is especially the case for NGOs dedicated to *minority rights, gender equality, and the struggle for ecological standards*. We must ensure that EU Member States are prepared to welcome threatened or banned NGOs from Russia and to allow them to operate from EU territory if needed. It is important to make such support available to the entire regional variety of Russian society: there are a lot of initiatives and organizations throughout Russia that deserve our solidarity and support. An important instrument in this regard is the European Endowment for Democracy, which should be strengthened and expanded.

**c. Our Russia and Eastern Europe policies are informed by historical memory and recognition of responsibilities and traumas**

Europe's relationship with all our Eastern neighbours will always unfold against the background of our tragic common history, including most importantly World War II, but also the following period of the division of Europe during the Cold War.

We are bound by our shared 20th century history, regardless of political orientation and irrespective of specific Russian government policies or heads of state. We hence reject all efforts by Russian political elites to instrumentalise historical memory to foster their own interests.

We are also conscious of the fact that for many Eastern European and Baltic states their occupation by the Soviet Union is connected to memories of suppression, loss of independence and human tragedies that did not stop after the great victory over Nazism. We recognise and build on a variety of memories

among European societies without neglecting the responsibility of Germany and its allies for the grave crimes during World War II.

**d. We respect Russia's interests, but not Russia's revisionism**

We reject a policy of division into spheres of influence, as being a self-serving power game by larger actors at the expense of smaller states, using various trade, economic, and financial, as well as open and covert political and military means. We do, however, recognize that the Russian Federation has regional interests beyond its own borders. It is important to achieve a balance of all interests with the participation of all concerned parties, provided this is compliant with international law, the UN Charter, and the Helsinki Final Act. We work against the subjugation of smaller states to dominant ones. In questions of alliance membership for states between the EU and Russia, our guiding principle is free choice of joining alliances. In the future, it should be the responsibility of the respective regional alliances to find a mode of informing and consulting each other in the course of possible expansions without interfering with the sovereign decision of aspiring members. The long-term goal should be to achieve a resilient regional political and security architecture. We recognise that the OSCE has become an important mechanism for various technical tasks in the region, but lost its role as an effective forum for geostrategic consultations. We need to enable a discussion involving all regional actors from the EU to Russia, including the states of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, to discuss the relevant regional geostrategic issues. Our solidarity with the EU's Eastern Partnership countries should be underpinned by a clear strategy for long-term engagement, which also includes rebuilding trust in the EU as a reliable partner on security issues, such as the need for the EU's greater involvement in peaceful conflict resolution.

**e. We rise to the challenge of systemic competition**

A decade ago, the Russian leadership made a conscious decision to develop an ideological alternative to the European model of democratic values and liberal democracy, and to become an international leader and promoter of this new confrontational doctrine. The Russian leadership has broken with the core value of democracy and declared itself a bastion of alleged "cultural traditionalism" and patriarchy. The consequences of this decision are in direct conflict with the European and Universal Declarations of Human Rights, as well as with principles of the rule of law as defined by the Venice Commission.

Our important premise is this: at the heart of this tension is not an ideological rivalry, but an ideological attack. It is not the EU that is moving away from the universal canon, but Russia. The EU can hardly escape this competition without

risking the loss of its own fundamental orientation, because the attack is taking place in international organizations, in numerous neighbouring states and even within the EU itself. We are forced into an “arms race” of world views, a spiral we can hardly avoid. We must strengthen our own resilience of values, rights and principles, underpin our own credibility, and hold the Russian Federation fully accountable to its self-imposed obligations under international law.

**f. There are red lines for cooperation with Russian state actors**

Despite differences in our world outlook and values, we rely on cooperation with countries like Russia or China. It is an undeniable fact that in an increasingly interconnected world, we depend on cooperation with core actors, even more so with those who have great potential to solve global problems or creating greater disruption, such as the Russian Federation. However, we must cope with four problems that arise in this context:

- 1) Such cooperation may serve our interests but endanger our values.
- 2) Such cooperation may serve our short-term interests but jeopardize our long-term goals.
- 3) Such cooperation may boost our interests in an isolated area but endanger our values in other areas of international cooperation.
- 4) Such cooperation can serve our interests but jeopardize those of our allies.

To address those challenges in a tailored way, we differentiate along *three modes of cooperation: economic transactions, institutional cooperation and alliance cooperation*.

**In economic transactions**, interests may differ, but intersect. Major economic projects are of particular relevance. Negative examples from this area include activities such as Nord Stream 2 or the construction of the Paks II nuclear power plant by Rosatom in Hungary. For projects with a high degree of scale and relevance, the following must be borne in mind: in the Russian Federation under the current leadership all relevant politics is business and all relevant business is politics. Therefore, no joint transactional projects should be implemented by the EU without prior political due diligence regarding transparency, corruption and political implications. Three prerequisites are important: first, such projects should not jeopardize our *solidarity among EU countries or with EU neighbours*. Second, the implementation of projects should not benefit structures of *corruption either in the Russian Federation or in the EU*. Third, the projects should not have a *negative impact on human rights or the environment*.

**Institutional cooperation** is immensely important within international organizations and multilateral treaties. Our aim is to jointly promote complementary or equal interests within the framework of institutions or



multilateral regimes. Such cooperation is especially important for us in the realm of environmental issues and the green transformation of both Russia and the EU, including within the framework of the Green Deal. Two points are important in this case: First, joining forces in certain specific fields does not presuppose any concessions regarding values, especially environmental, human rights and democracy issues, in other areas of international cooperation (*no cross-topical linkage*). Second, no matter how technical and specific the issue at stake, the EU should never disregard geostrategic implications and the interests of its partners: even in "cooperative" areas such as pandemic control or climate protection, our negotiating partners seek to gain geostrategic influence. We also need to be vigilant in other areas of international cooperation, such as in criminal matters, taking into account that Russia might use them as a means to exert unacceptable, politically motivated external influence, or to cope with political opponents. This does not mean that we should be reluctant to reach agreements, but we must factor in possible geostrategic and long-term costs when negotiating with actors like Russia (*geopolitics always priced-in!*).

**Alliance cooperation** is only possible if long-term strategic interests or goals correspond. Such cooperation with the Russian Federation is desirable in principle in the very long term, but currently not imaginable.

#### **g. We pursue nuclear arms control and nuclear disarmament with Russia**

The collapse of arms control with Russia (withdrawals from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, from the Treaty on Open Skies) and the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament under the Non-Proliferation treaty, as well as Russia's rejection of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is of great concern for the security of European citizens. This is coupled with a dangerous modernization of Russian nuclear arsenals and their means of delivery and the introduction of destabilizing technologies (hypersonic nuclear-capable missiles, torpedoes, etc.). In addition, Russian nuclear-capable aircraft and warships approach EU territory or European allies and test air and maritime defences on an almost daily basis, which is totally unacceptable. We want the EU and Russia to initiate a process leading to a vision of a European Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains. For this to happen we need reciprocity. Through reciprocal regional disarmament steps by Russia and EU countries, we want to allow for a situation where Russia's entire nuclear arsenal and their means of delivery should be subject to reduction and elimination within a broader context, which would also include French, British, US and Chinese arsenals.

**h. As a new priority, we want to consistently combat money laundering**

We must recognize the fight against money laundering as our own *moral responsibility*, a matter of *geostrategic precaution* and an issue of our “*national security*”. We must accept our own share of responsibility for the rampant corruption in today’s Russia. As recently revealed again in the OpenLux affair, all too often, the EU countries and their business actors act as silent accomplices or even beneficiaries in harbouring corrupt funds from the Russian Federation, and the European Union must take responsibility for sharpening its own anti-money laundering regulation, or to consistently implement and enforce the existing rules. This would start with the proper implementation of Anti-Money Laundering Directives by EU Member States, as well as improving their performance across key effectiveness indicators at FATF level. Going forward, the enforcement in Member States should be effectively monitored and any infringement should have legal consequences.

Beyond anti-money laundering legislation, more transparency and cooperation are also necessary. To ensure this, we need a strategic cooperation with the new US administration, as well as other like-minded allies that function as harbours for dirty money originating in Russia. The confidentiality of real estate registers must be abolished or limited, as should the practice of silent partnerships and non-transparent beneficial ownerships. National registers need to be interconnected, and high quality data needs to be ensured. We need improved, civil rights-proof solutions to effectively combat sham or custodian ownership of assets, even if they are family members. We also need new and effective solutions for verifying the legitimacy of money sources. In order to achieve this, the findings of the European intelligence services should be better integrated and coordinated, and information from whistle blowers or certain verified anti-corruption NGOs from Russia more effectively taken into account as legitimate sources.

**i. We strengthen resilience and countermeasure capabilities against hybrid interference**

The Russian strategy of hybrid aggression presents a difficult challenge. It does not use the traditional military means of attack, but rather utilizes massive intelligence services’ resources and techniques, employs the media, targets the digital sphere, and sides with populist and anti-democratic actors; its impacts are therefore highly decentralised. The difficulty also lies in our inability to quickly and precisely attribute attacks to the Kremlin, which hamper the possibility of a timely response, let alone a pre-emptive one. All this is aggravated by the fact that domestic European actors, including proxies of Russian energy companies or other Russian business entities, often willingly or unwillingly further the interests of the Russian government and influence

political processes. These actors, it must also be noted, enjoy civil liberties and other protections of the European legal framework.

The EU's response should be threefold:

*Strengthening resilience, driving a strategy of credible countermeasures and a clear strategic differentiation.*

First, it is important to **strengthen resilience** and thus our ability to defend and regenerate the power of own institutions and critical infrastructure under attack. It is necessary to identify the hypothetical weaknesses and potential breaking points of our economy and democracy, subject those critical systems to crisis tests and protect them against external attacks with resilience mechanisms and contingency plans. Furthermore, we need a strong strategy against disinformation campaigns, but also against narratives of foreign state-associated media that distort public discourse in the EU. While these narratives often originate from the Kremlin, they are sometimes even deliberately shared by actors in the EU, meaning that EU Member States need to take measures to protect their own media landscapes. All this must be done without restricting our own press freedoms. Systematic monitoring of content offered by Russian and Russian-affiliated media and internet providers (whether in Russian- or in any other language) is necessary in order to identify disinformation campaigns quickly and to develop immediate and long-term counterstrategies. Supporting independent media, journalists and bloggers in Russia is crucial in order to strengthen alternative sources and channels that are not controlled by the Kremlin.

Second, the EU and its Member States must develop **appropriate countermeasures** in response to hybrid attacks and instruments that increase the costs for perpetrators. Importantly, those measures do not have to be reciprocal, but must be adequate and credible. When in doubt, responses to hybrid attacks must be potentially more costly to the perpetrator than their own initial attacks. They need not be executed with the same intensity and identical means, but it must be clearly conveyed that comparably strong capabilities are available and that the decision threshold for such countermeasures is realistically low. This is the only way to sustainably deter future hybrid attacks. For example, it must be clear to the Russian side that, in the event of digital attacks, the EU is capable and willing not only to fend them off, but also to make use of countermeasure-instruments or effectively design informational campaigns, even if the EU has so far abstained from doing so. We must credibly communicate and raise the very specific costs of such attacks for the perpetrators.

**Sanctions are also part** of the counter-response toolkit. We are convinced that targeted sanctions are the right and fair way to go, but we must stand ready also for sectoral and economic sanctions. Such sanctions could first target the financing of intelligence services and the military, as the main

income of the Russian Federation's budget are gas and oil sales, directly financing the enormous capacities and resources of the Russian civilian and military intelligence services, military technology, such as its nuclear force, but also deployments to Ukraine, Syria and Libya. It must be clear that such sanctions are in place in the event of further escalation on the part of the Russian government. To remain credible in this regard, sanctions mechanisms in the European Union must be redesigned. The current decision-making process is too slow and too complex, because it is over-legalized. Hence, sanctions cannot achieve what they aim at: a desired change in behaviour. This can and must change by reconceptualising sanctions as inherently political and discretionary instruments, not entirely subjugated to judicial review. It is not an oligarch's human right to have a Schengen-visa or visit the EU as a tourist, just as there is no human right to free foreign investment into expensive real estate, even less so if the individuals trying to do so are deemed by the EU as risks or threats to their national interests. We have to restore decisions about it as part of the traditionally discretionary foreign policy toolkit, not decisions that you can always bring to review by the European Court of Justice. In addition, the EU should draw on the UK's new Global Anti-Corruption Sanctions Regulations and adopt an EU anti-corruption sanctions regime, to complement the current EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

Finally, it is also essential to resist intimidation by *false equivalencies*. Hybrid attacks only work if they shake the trust in societal fabrics that have functioned so far and make societies question their existential foundations. We will not abolish our fundamental rights and the rule of law standards within the EU under threat of hybrid attacks, nor will we shy away from our strategies in the face of false comparisons. Hybrid interference in Europe's affairs is not comparable to European support for Russian civil society and criticism of human rights violations. When interventions in our internal affairs occur through Russian state media or digital interventions, their goal is to destabilise functioning democratic rule of law-systems. When the EU supports civil society in Russia, this is not against, but in favour of upholding universal human rights and supporting democratic principles. The EU is not interested in overthrowing the government in Moscow; our support is for Russian citizens in order to ensure that they can enjoy their rights and liberties guaranteed by international law, such as the common standards of the Council of Europe. Russia owes the provision of these liberties not only to its citizens but also, in accordance with its own multilateral obligations, to the international community. The support of free civil society in Russia is thus part of the implementation of these obligations, while the interventions of the Russian government in the internal sovereignty of the EU are either openly contrary to international law (e.g. homicide, use of banned chemical substances or cyber attacks) or they serve purposes contrary to international law (e.g. intervention in internal affairs of the EU through propaganda and destabilization without human rights justification).

**j. We use technological standards and the open internet to support free spaces and restrict oppressive technologies**

In Russia, new technologies are used for the purpose of repression by state authorities, but they are also needed as free spaces for civil society. We need, therefore, to develop and use effective strategies in the field of digital policy.

On the one hand, it is a matter of strengthening innovation that empowers: Above all, the free internet that is open to everyone, open-source technologies, services for secure communication, decentralized platforms, and new low-threshold and privacy-protected, attractive social media must all constitute our offer to the Russian population in times of repression. With these technologies, self-realization, pluralism and diversity, and free opinion-making processes can extricate themselves from beneath the pressure of repressive state control, and citizens' social and political self-expression can flourish in the digital realm. Likewise, it is crucial to pressure dominant technology providers such as GAFAM not to give in to governments' attempts to impose restrictions on free speech on the internet, including in the form of automated filters. Now that the Russian government has brought conventional mass media under its control, the internet must continue to remain the last lacuna of collective and individual freedom and self-expression.

On the other hand, it is a matter of *preventing and containing technologies that oppress*. We need to expand global technological standards in privacy, create ethical and legal standards that have a signalling effect to promote fundamental rights protection, work toward an international ban of mass surveillance technologies and invasive social scoring systems, and insist on banning autonomous weapons systems. The recent incidents show that Russian citizens are being prosecuted for peaceful demonstrations upon identification with biometric facial recognition on mass surveillance videos or by means of subsequent cell phone tracking. Neither Europe nor the United States of America or any other partners should participate in creating technologies or laws that are used for the suppression of democracy and the violation of human rights. Producers of such surveillance products from third countries should be technologically isolated and not receive any relevant sensitive components from the EU.

**k. We strengthen the collective power and credibility of the EU including strategic unbundling**

Ultimately, a successful Russia strategy involves the question of internal coherence, and capacity to act, as well as credibility in our own guiding principles. The EU must credibly demonstrate that it is capable of decision-making and taking action in the field of foreign policy. To this end, we need a structural reform of the EU's foreign policy, including an extension of the

competencies of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and a different role for the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, characterized by more autonomy and clear responsibilities. In addition, we must strive for a reform of the decision-making process, in particular the abolition of unanimity in foreign-policy matters, as well as for central coordination of the European foreign intelligence services and the fight against money laundering. The aforementioned de-bureaucratization and reducing of over-legalization of the sanction imposition process must be part of those reforms. These changes will take time. In the short and medium term, a credible foreign policy requires clearer communication and leadership by Member States, especially by the governments in Paris and Berlin. Credibility also implies safeguarding unity and intra-European solidarity. In this respect, the big European players, especially Germany and France, must replace their self-centred claim to leadership with one that serves the good of all in order to ensure the EU's unified voice. In fact, all Member States must coordinate better among themselves in order to have a common approach towards Russia and stop the current practice of various national initiatives, because credible EU action will need consistent unity as a basis. Our ability to act in our own interest also requires re-evaluation of strategic dependencies from actors in the Russian Federation. Dependencies on rail infrastructure, raw materials, especially oil and gas, as well as metals (notably iron/steel, aluminium, nickel) must be reduced, especially, but not exclusively, in the energy sector. Such strategic unbundling must become an important component of our policies.

Despite diversification efforts, about 40 % of EU gas imports and 30 % of oil imports still come from the Russian Federation, and some Member States remain overwhelmingly dependent on Russian gas. This has been cemented by the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which is a move in the wrong direction from a geopolitical, energy independence and political solidarity point of view. Moreover, Russia's most recent energy strategy for 2035 indicates that it is in fact planning to increase gas export capacity through pipelines in the western direction. In this context, it is imperative for the EU and its members to accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal and to reject the notion of natural gas as an alleged intermediate lower-carbon path towards achieving the EU climate goals. Upholding an ambitious and resolute European green agenda, including the full synchronisation of all Member States' electricity grids with the Synchronous grid of Continental Europe, is the best long-term response to the problem of Europe's strategic energy dependency on Russia. This agenda should also encompass resistance to the expansion of Russia's nuclear energy sector towards the EU, including robust measures to discourage construction of controversial Rosatom-built nuclear power plants, such as the one in Ostravets, Belarus, and to prevent electricity produced in such plants being sold in the EU market.

Additionally, we must focus on saving the credibility of the EU concerning its value-oriented behaviour internally. The EU shall approach its own shortcomings in the areas of rule of law and fundamental rights much more



directly and honestly, shortcomings that go beyond the anti-democratic rollback in Hungary and Poland. For instance, police violence, antiquated criminal laws, and resistance to gender equality and diversity in some Member States damage our reputation and credibility abroad, despite the fact that those problems are by no means comparable with the oppressive regime in the Russian Federation. Also Russian-speaking minorities in the Union should enjoy full protection, including non-discrimination, the right to education, linguistic rights and the right to maintain peaceful contacts across frontiers.

For reasons of our foreign policy credibility, the EU must communicate comparable expectations vis-à-vis all partners. Denunciation of violations of international law and, if necessary, harsh consequences must be taken consistently, and the EU must refrain from measuring with double standards. The EU must stop further stretching its red line when it comes to unacceptable behaviour by the government and authorities of the Russian Federation, and instead follow through with announced actions, especially when it comes to deterrence. It also needs a detailed plan for responding to aggressions that cross the EU's red line, in order to be prepared and avoid spending crucial time before reacting. This is the only possible way for us to be taken seriously as a consistent actor with a credible foreign policy, both in Moscow and elsewhere.