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## Chapter 1

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# Introduction: European Union–Russia Relations as the Partnership That Failed

March 2014 witnessed a dramatic rupture in European Union–Russia relations, and indeed even a collapse of the wider European security order, which had been in gestation for over 25 years. Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and the destabilization of the eastern parts of Ukraine that followed, brought the European Union (EU) and Russia to the brink of a severe confrontation with each other as well. The EU imposed a series of restrictive measures; Russia retaliated with its own counter-sanctions; and most of the cooperation was halted. What is more, a military conflict between Russia and an EU member state was seen by many as likelier than at any time since the end of the Cold War. The prognosis for the future is dire, and there seems to be no easy way out of the vicious and antagonistic cycle.

The paradox is that neither the EU nor Russia aspired to this state of affairs. The EU favours cooperation with Russia, and vice versa, but the problem, and the story that will be recounted in full on the pages that follow, concerns on *whose* terms that cooperation should be carried out. The situation resembles a classical dilemma – a tragedy, in fact – where neither side wants the outcome it has obtained, but at the same time both have been unable to alter the policies that have contributed to the problem in the first place. At the end of the book, we will discuss some of the options for how this dilemma could be solved. In the meantime, it is important to probe how the parties ended up in these circumstances.

In this book the emphasis is put on the European Union and Russia, and the interaction between them, but essentially this is a book about the evolving and historical relationship between ‘Russia’ and ‘Europe’ (see Haukkala 2008; White and Feklyunina 2015). Both these terms are tricky and can easily mislead if they are taken

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literally. The EU, of course, is nothing more than the current incarnation and the latest institutional manifestation of a conglomeration of European nation-states that used to be, but are today not entirely, 'Western European'. In the process, it has reached a level of integration unprecedented in time and place. Twenty-five years ago, when our story was just beginning, the EU was still the European Community (EC). In the future it might be called something different yet again, or it may even cease to exist as we know it (Zielonka 2014). By the same token, Russia is officially called the Russian Federation today, but for most of the previous century it was the Soviet Union, and later in this century we may possibly end up talking more about the Eurasian Union than Russia.

Hence, on the pages that follow we should keep in mind that, on the one hand, we are dealing with a *longue durée* problem of Russia's place in (or with) Europe, both politically and institutionally (see Neumann 1996 and Hopf 2008). But on the other hand, we cannot avoid discussing the more technical present-day issues concerning the practical modalities of building those relations in the here and now. Therefore, a natural starting point for the narrative is not some sixteenth-century encounters (cf. Neumann 2011), although we will reflect upon some earlier relations too, but rather the end of the Cold War and the formation of relations between the European Union and Russia at that point in time and place.

Coincidentally, one day before the European Union was established by 12 member states of the European Communities at the Maastricht Summit in December 1991, President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic met with the leaders of the Ukrainian and Belorussian Soviet Republics in Belavezha Forest in Western Belarus and decided to dissolve the Soviet Union. The EU and the successor state of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, have been developing their relations ever since these historical events. In the initial stages, the relationship revealed certain asymmetries, because one union was integrating and the other disintegrating, and their economic welfare and living standards were at very different levels. These different starting points were reflected in the European Commission's Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) assistance programme in 1991. Before long, the two put their relations on a more stable and equal footing by concluding the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1994, which duly entered into force in 1997. Since then, they have made considerable efforts to develop the relations. They promoted

the Northern Dimension as an interface between the EU and Russia to engage with each other at the regional level and created strategies to deal with each other in the early 2000s. They established the Four Common Spaces in economics, judicial matters, external security, and research and education in 2003; adopted a set of road maps for their implementation in 2005; and agreed on a Partnership for Modernisation in 2010. They also started to renegotiate the PCA. Yet, and all this hectic activity to enhance their relations and cooperation notwithstanding, the two ‘strategic partners’ ended up in a serious crisis in 2014 due to the conflict in Ukraine and, some would say, even *over* Ukraine.

The overall mood in EU–Russia relations had deteriorated long before the Ukraine crisis. The regular summits brought no major results, and the parties were not able to conclude a new basic treaty to replace the clearly outdated PCA. Even a decade ago some Russian analysts concluded that ‘Russia has left the West’ (Trenin 2006) and that it had little interest in seriously developing its relations with the EU. Many ‘EUropeans’ proposed that it was time to re-evaluate the relationship with Russia, get ‘realistic’ and stop pretending that EU–Russia relations constituted a functioning partnership (Barysch, Coker and Jesien 2011; Krastev and Leonard 2014). Deadlock, stagnation and fatigue were buzzwords often heard in the context of EU–Russia relations in the decade preceding the Ukraine conflict. Yet very few people expected a serious confrontation between the EU and Russia. When drafting the first version of this introduction a few years ago, in order to balance the predominantly negative view, we wanted to highlight many positive elements in the relationship, namely, that the parties were still cooperating closely over many issues; trade relations had flourished; increased interaction between citizens and civil societies existed; and no serious threat of a military confrontation between the parties seemed likely. Unfortunately, and although some forms of cooperation luckily still exist, not one of the above can be said with complete confidence anymore.

This is a bad outcome of the relations and an analytical puzzle to be solved in its own right. Arguably, EU–Russia relations are crucially important to both parties. As briefly highlighted, they have devoted a great deal of attention to nurturing them, but at the same time the actual interaction between the two has also often turned out to be mutually disappointing. That said, when seen from the perspective of Brussels, it is perhaps only the transatlantic relationship with the United States (US) that is more fundamental when

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it comes to the external positioning of the EU in world politics. In many ways, the EU's policy towards Russia can be seen as the hardest test of the credibility and nature of its external relations. The relationship with Russia exposes the EU's ability, or inability, to form a coherent policy and implement it. The received wisdom in the extant literature seems to be that the EU's track record in this respect has left a lot to be desired (see e.g. Haukkala 2009b; Forsberg 2013). Seen from the perspective of Moscow, the European Union is not only the primary trading partner but also a source of identity for, and a challenge to, Russia's domestic and foreign policy choices. Seen more generally, the relationship between the EU and Russia is one that has relevance in several key respects in the wider world politics as well. It is one of the key relations in the emerging new world order, or rather, if the relationship realized its full potential, it would be an important centre of gravity in global politics. By contrast, the problems and stagnation in the relationship have been part and parcel of the still ongoing shift in the global dynamics away from the Pan-European, or Eurasian, continent to the Pacific Area.

Moreover, the nature of EU–Russia relations is an important case study because it is often seen as a crucial test case for the existence of ‘the West’ as a meaningful entity in world politics, on the one hand, or indigenous European actors to begin with, on the other (cf. Bull 1982). An often-heard complaint, particularly in conjunction with the Ukraine conflict, has been that the EU and its member states are not actors operating on their own volition, but merely a hapless collection of stooges operating at the behest of the US (Johnstone 2014; see also Sakwa 2015). Others, however, have detected in EU–Russia relations a challenge to the Cold War idea of ‘the West’. Even during the Ukraine crisis, some pundits saw the United States and the EU diverging in their policies on Russia – with Germany in particular representing a soft approach and paving the way for a closer EU–Russia relationship that would sweep the transatlantic relationship aside (Szabo 2015).

In this book, we examine EU–Russia relations from three scholarly perspectives: European studies, Russian studies and international relations (IR), including foreign policy analysis (FPA). The European studies perspective prevails when we look at EU foreign and security policy and external relations at large; Russian studies predominate when we look at Russian foreign policy – both combined with insights from FPA; and finally, the theoretical vantage points of IR provide insights into the interaction between the two

and their position in the global system. We outline the historical evolution of the relationship and consider in detail how it has functioned in the main issue areas, starting with economics and trade, political and security relations, and energy and environment, as well as justice and home affairs, and culture. We offer explanations for the overall evolution as well as the major successes and failures in the relationship.

Research on EU–Russia relations is plentiful, and works that cover either the overall evolution of relations or the key issues are in good supply (Pinder and Shishkov 2002; Prozorov 2006; Gower and Timmins 2008a; Haukkala 2010; Makarychev 2014; Maass 2016; Sergunin 2016; for a comprehensive overview of the field, see Schmidt-Felzmann 2015). Much of the extant research has, however, been policy oriented and has offered up-to-date analysis of the changing agendas in EU–Russia relations, either after or before major summits or other significant events such as the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. The need for a longer-term perspective and theoretical insights to balance the presentism is strongly in line with the general observations of works on EU foreign policy (Jørgensen 2015: 24). Although many theoretical perspectives have been applied to EU–Russia relations, there is no single paradigm that currently guides the analysis. Analysts have focused on the power struggle and economic interdependence as well as identities and worldviews as the key factors influencing and shaping the relationship. This book does not advance a single theoretical perspective, but attempts instead to amalgamate the existing literature and insights into a coherent overall narrative of relations while spelling out the relative strengths and weaknesses of different theoretical approaches and demonstrating where they have particular relevance as partial explanations. Nevertheless, we attempt to demonstrate the importance of the psychology of interaction and the negative dynamics that led to the spiral of deteriorating relations.

To this end, the book approaches EU–Russia relations in a comprehensive manner. We analyse the entirety of relations and examine both successes and failures, including the current rupture in relations, on their own merits. In terms of research design, this comprehensive approach also makes it easier to address the question of why cooperation or conflict has prevailed. Simply stated, if we find more cooperation in one issue-area than another, we can think that these areas are autonomous and that conflict depends more on the issues than the parties. By contrast, if cooperation and

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conflict vary similarly across issue-areas over time, or spread from one issue-area to another, we might conclude that the problem is not so much related to the issues at stake as such, but rather to the parties and their views of each other. We are also mindful of the fact that EU–Russia relations do not operate in a vacuum, but are indeed part and parcel of wider global developments and the ebb and flow of relations between Russia and the West.

Although we have covered all the traditional topics and tried to expand the analysis to those areas where little previous research exists, a fully complete appraisal is beyond the scope of this publication. For future students of EU–Russia relations, there are still plenty of issues that have been on the agenda but which have not yet received systematic empirical examination. Nor are our theory review and favoured applications comprehensive enough to cover more nuanced and original theoretical explorations. Finally, the analysis is lacking to the extent that access to the actual decision-making process both on the Russian as well as the EU side is rather restricted and likely to remain opaque for quite some time.

This book starts with an analysis of the political and institutional development of EU–Russia relations. Chapter 2 takes a tour d’horizon of relations from the beginning of the 1990s to the present. Special attention will be devoted to the formative phase of relations, namely, how and under what terms Russia was incorporated into the emerging post–Cold War order in Europe. The negotiation of the PCA features prominently here because it is one of the contested issues of present-day relations. The argument is that although the EU and Russia were not entirely equal partners during this period, the EU was ready to give in and negotiate with Russia on many issues. Following this formative period, we discuss the longer phase when the relations were repeatedly expanded but which also saw them being increasingly contested. During the 2000s, a growing mismatch emerged between the voiced and commonly agreed objectives and the underlying realities both in the EU and Russia. It became a partnership which, until the disruption caused by the conflict in Ukraine, endured but did not develop towards closer integration – an unfulfilled partnership in essence.

In Chapter 3, we look at the key actors in EU–Russia relations. The comprehensive nature of relations has entailed that the list of actors on both sides has been equally comprehensive. This situation has been further complicated by the fact that both the EU and Russia have, in effect, been moving targets in the sense that both

have been consolidating their own actorness and policies during this period. Particular emphasis will be put on how the EU member states have interacted with Russia and how the varying web of bilateral relations affects the evolution of the wider partnership between the EU and Russia. In particular, we demonstrate how key national interests diverge and how this has affected the coherence of the EU's policy towards Russia.

Next we examine a host of issue-areas that demonstrate the broad scope of cooperation in general, but also the nature of some recurring problems in relations that have emerged across these diverse issues. In Chapter 4 we look at trade, energy and the environment as the genuine backbone of EU–Russia relations. Despite all the political wrangling between the two, the relationship is essentially an economic partnership based on some natural synergies and promises thereof. That said, the main puzzle discussed in Chapter 4 is why, despite the rather fortuitous beginnings at the turn of the 1990s, the economy and energy have also become negatively politicized and securitized, turning into a factor that increased mistrust and lessened the prospects of mutually satisfactory political ties in the process.

Another area where the partnership between the EU and Russia seemed promising at first, but which subsequently proved to be a source of increasing tension, is that of democracy, human rights and justice and home affairs, which is discussed in Chapter 5. Here we look at the evolution of these issues on the EU–Russia agenda, focusing particularly on the Chechen issue. The upshot of this problem is that although the EU and Russia initially agreed to foster common values, Russia went on to put more emphasis on material interests instead. The EU duly insisted on the role of values, only to later decide to lessen their emphasis in the relationship; but meanwhile Russia developed its own alternative set of values, which it started to propagate vis-à-vis the EU. Moreover, the chapter analyses cooperation in this Common Space, paying particular attention to the visa question.

Chapter 6 deals with foreign and security policy cooperation, the Common Space that is known as 'external security'. Although the EU and Russia were both willing to develop cooperation in this area in the early 2000s, the concrete results remained meagre. This chapter looks at the evolution of relations in this field, focusing particularly on the Yugoslav wars, frozen conflicts in the former Soviet Union and the Russo-Georgian war, as well as joint approaches to security issues and crisis management in the Middle East and Africa.

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The negative effects of the conflict in Ukraine are also analysed in Chapter 6. Overall, most of the global and regional security problems that both parties have identified have not been resolved. The recent record with regard to Iran and Syria demonstrates a mixed package: cooperation is still possible, but difficult.

Chapter 7 is devoted to science, education and culture, an area of cooperation that was defined as the fourth Common Space in the relationship between the EU and Russia. Here again we can witness great promise at the beginning, some achievements along the way, such as Russia's participation in the Bologna process, but numerous disappointments and quarrels to boot, culminating in the stagnation and cessation of many projects and cooperation schemes due to the overall negative development in the relationship.

Chapter 8 moves on to examine the so-called 'common' – or shared – neighbourhood between the EU and Russia. The countries in between make up the key geographic area where the EU and Russia interact and which has had some unprecedented repercussions on the wider EU–Russia relations. It is argued in this chapter that due to lack of progress in other areas, the neighbourhood question has increasingly come to dominate the relations between the EU and Russia. Indeed, it can be argued that the 'common neighbourhood' became, first, a theatre for integration competition between the EU and Russia, whereby both parties tried to advance their own development models with a view to enticing the countries into their ranks. As a consequence, the current situation in the region is unsatisfactory for both parties, as each seems to be unable to realize its goals. On the contrary, it appears that the competition between the EU and Russia over the countries of Eastern Europe has only emboldened the countries in between, who have become adept at playing the two strategic partners against each other. Yet, as the war in Georgia in August 2008 and the conflict in Ukraine have both shown, the current dynamics entail significant risks that could spill over into much more negative and dangerous developments for the wider European security as well.

Chapter 9 revisits the historical narrative of the relationship and the development in the various issue areas in the light of key theoretical debates. First, it examines what the relations with Russia reveal about the EU as an international actor. The evolution of EU–Russia relations is discussed in terms of various explanations of what the aims of the EU have been and what has been its ability to have an impact on third powers in general. We also give Russia the same

treatment. The tentative conclusion is that the EU has had relatively little impact on Russia, but that the lack of influence did not stem so much from the incoherence of its policies or the lack of military resources, but simply from the fact that many issues where the EU has tried to exercise influence have been matters that have belonged to Moscow's own remit as a fully sovereign decision-maker. The EU has been a 'normative power' only partially as far as its aims and means have been concerned, but even less so in terms of its actual influence. Russia, in turn, has been pursuing its economic interests and increasingly its wider geostrategic goals, including its status, in its relations with the EU. Finally, we take a look at explanations that deal with the overall evolution of the relationship. We start with realist theory that put emphasis on power relations, proceed with interest and value-based explanations, and finally discuss identity and interaction-based accounts for the conflict and cooperation between the EU and Russia. Our final objective in Chapter 9 is to outline our own analytical narrative stressing negative interaction dynamics to provide a better understanding of the failed partnership.

The final chapter of the book focuses on the future of EU–Russia relations. Based on the factors which – in the light of our empirical analysis – have influenced the relations, it also seeks to provide some policy-relevant guidance on how to improve the ties between the two. We argue that the situation in Ukraine is not the root cause of the problems, because these had emerged and persisted in practically all areas of cooperation well before the rupture of relations in 2014. Yet neither side can escape the continued interdependence and the eventual pull of partnership. The question to which we revisit at the end of the book is whether, and in what way, the two increasingly alienated partners can find the foresight and wisdom to reestablish their partnership. We argue that the conflict over Ukraine was not inevitable, but rather the result of the unintended effects of the choices made by both parties. The same applies to the improvement of ties: although there is no automatic guarantee that the parties will return to cooperation, moderation and reciprocity will be required to mend the fences. It is possible, although far from desirable, that the current conflict dynamics will prove to be too path dependent to be challenged and that EU–Russia relations will be stuck in a conflictual mode for the foreseeable future. But before we can draw these conclusions, we must recount the story of the relations between the two during the post–Cold War era in its entirety.

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