



ISSN: 2146-1740  
<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/ayd>,  
Araştırma Makalesi



## THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE EUROPEAN UNION RELATIONS

Andrey BRANITSKIY<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

#### Article Info

#### **Received:**

29/04/2021

#### **Accepted:**

26/05/2021

An analysis of the European Union and the Russian Federation relations in 1991-2021 is given in the article. The author divides the epoch into two main periods: the path to strategic partnership (1991-2013) and the collapse of links (2014-2021). The reasons for the degradation of the RF and the EU relations are investigated. The author reveals the cardinal contradictions between the attempts to build the Greater Europe and to restore the role of Russia as a Great Power after the Cold War.

**Keywords:** The Russian federation, The EU, International relations.

### 1. Introduction

The EU is the main trading partner and foreign investor for the Russian Federation. The sides have got strong historical and cultural ties. In general, relations between the United Europe and Russia are very complicated. On the one hand, Russia is a European country, a member of the Council of Europe. It shares a common history with some EU member States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Poland), and a common Orthodox culture with another ones (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania). Russians are related by their origin to many Slavic peoples of the United Europe: Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Slovenes, Croats. On the other hand, the most part of Russia's territory is located in Asia, and a significant part of the country's population does not consider themselves Europeans. Russia pursues an independent foreign policy and doesn't share some values declared as "Pan-European" by Brussels.

There are two main periods of the relations development: 1) the path to strategic partnership (1991-2013), a positive trend; 2) competition and degradation of links (2014-2021),

<sup>1</sup> Professor, State University of Nizhny Novgorod, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9210-0698, abranitskiy@yandex.ru.

a negative trend. At the beginning of 2021 Russia and the EU are in the confrontation because of Belorussian affairs, the Navalny case and sanctions war. The sides are engaged in a sharp struggle for influence in Central and Eastern Europe. The point at issue is not whether there can be business as usual, but whether Russia can do business with the European Union at all, which is not simply talking down to the Russian Federation but is doing so extremely haughtily, demanding that Russia answer for the sins which it is allegedly guilty of.

A new President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen noted that Russia has not yet matured sufficiently to be a geopolitical partner of the EU. The pandemic has also contributed to the deterioration of bilateral relations. Moreover, Brussels is so far unable to get the better of the Baltic States and Poland, which are taking advantage of the principle of consensus and solidarity to block the more or less constructive approaches to the development of relations with Russia (Интервью, 2020). But there is a hope that some common interests of the sides (for example, our economic cooperation, efforts to strengthen European safety and stability) can change the situation in future.

The United Europe needs Russian resources, and Russia needs some European technologies. It will be very difficult to deal with many issues of interest to the European Union without the Russian Federation. We live in a world of interdependence, where good neighbor relations benefit all sides. It would be in the EU's own interests to maintain partner ties and work together with the Russian Federation. And Russia is always ready to resume, normalize and improve relations based on equality and mutual respect.

## **2. Russia and the United Europe on the Route to Strategic Partnership (1991-2013)**

On December 25, 1991 the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR changed the name of the state and the Russian Federation (Russia) appeared on the world political map. Soon the European Communities recognized Russia as the legal successor of the USSR. During the Cold War era, the EC and the USSR did not have legal relations: official contacts were established in 1988 only. (Lazareva, 2013) Then, on December 18, 1989 the parties signed an Agreement on Trade, Commercial and Economic Cooperation. (Шемятенков, 2003: 362-364) In 1991-1993 there was a difficult "transition period", when bilateral relations were regulated by this Agreement. On February 7, 1992 in Maastricht the Treaty on European Union was signed, which entered into force on November 1, next year. This is how the modern European Union emerged. And on December 25, 1993 the new Constitution of the Russian Federation put an end to the protracted political crisis in the Russian state.

Nevertheless, the relations between the EU and the Russian Federation developed even in this difficult time: in the first half of 1992 Brussels and Moscow exchanged drafts of a new agreement, and in November of the same year the negotiations began, which lasted about a year and a half. As a result, on June 24, 1994 the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between Russia and the EU (and its member States) was reached on the island of Corfu, covering three major areas of relations: political, trade and economic, cultural ones. This document was signed by the President of Russia Boris Yeltsin, the President of the European Commission Jacques Lucien Jean Delors and the heads of states and governments of all the 12 EU member States (Браницкий, Платонов, 2008: 190-220). The PCA entered into force on December 1, 1997, provided for the possibility of an annual automatic extension after 10 years. (Борко, 2011: 538) As we can see, the ratification of the Agreement took more than three years because of the next expansion of the EU: since January 1, 1995 Austria, Sweden and Finland became its members. Thus, the European Union and the Russian Federation got a long common border.

The institutional system of cooperation between Russia and the EU initially included high-level summits (twice a year), the Russia-EU Council in the format of the Russian Federation Government and the European Commission (annually or as appropriate), the Cooperation Council in the format of foreign Ministers, and the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. Also the meetings of the EU's Troika and Russia senior officials were planned, as well as expert consultations and the extensive use of various diplomatic channels. In the area of trade, the parties prolonged the most-favored-nation regime previously granted to each other. In 1997 the Round Table of European and Russian Industrialists and Entrepreneurs was organized for deepening the ties between the business communities. In the same year, the EU and Russia signed an agreement on trade in textile products (Кавешников, 2016: 530, 535). In September 1997 the European Union's "Northern dimension" initiative was launched at the conference in Rovaniemi, Finland. In December 1998 at the European Council summit in Vienna the "Northern dimension" was officially recognized as one of the directions of the EU's foreign and border policy, and its importance for the development of relations with Russia was emphasized (Александров, 2016: 493).

In 1998-1999 there was a short cooling of mutual relations between the parties, caused by the financial crisis, the war in the Balkans and the accession of the first three CEE countries to NATO. However, on June 3-4, 1999 the European Council summit in Cologne approved the Collective strategy of the European Union in relation to Russia. In this document the long-term

goals were called: strategic partnership relations, the formation of a common free trade area with the prospect of Russia's integration into the European economic area, the strengthening of stability and security in Europe and beyond (Борко, 2001: 381, 384-385). At the same meeting the heads of member States approved the concept of the "Northern dimension" (Александров, 2016: 493). Then, at the Russia-EU summit in Helsinki on October 22, 1999, the Strategy for developing relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union for the medium term (2000-2010) was presented. This document proposed building the United Europe without dividing lines, pursuing a course for an interconnected and balanced strengthening of the positions of Russia and the EU within the world community, and creating a reliable pan-European system of collective security. Both strategies recognized the need for partnership between the parties in the interests of peace, security, economic development, cultural cooperation, and strengthening the constructive role of Europe in the world (Борко, 2001: 381, 385). At the same time, Brussels intended to contribute to the further economic and political transformation of Russia, while Moscow sought truly equal cooperation.

At the end of 1999, further development of relations between the Russian Federation and the EU was suspended due to military actions in Chechnya. However, in June 2000, it resumed with renewed vigor when the EU summit in Santa Maria da Feira (Portugal) recognized the need of creating a strong and healthy partnership with Russia. This meeting also approved a specific action Plan for the "Northern dimension" for 2000-2003, which, in particular, proposed to promote the development of relations between EU member States and the regions of the Russian North-West, based on the experience of interaction between Finland and Russia (Александров, 2016: 493-496). In July of the same year, President Vladimir Putin approved the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, where the EU was given an honorary second place (after the CIS). The European Union dominated Russia's foreign economic relations. In addition, Russia needed the European Union to create a pan-European security system and resolve any local conflicts. In turn, the EU saw the Russian Federation as not only an important global player, the most powerful neighbor, but also as the largest supplier of energy resources, as well as a capacious market for European goods (Кавешников, 2016: 532). All these could become a solid basis for a strategic partnership based on positive interdependence.

In 2000-2005 economic and trade relations developed rapidly, and important long-term programs were adopted to fill the concept of strategic partnership with concrete content. At the same time, there were some trade disputes between the parties, as well as mutual claims on

certain political and politicized issues. In 2000 the agreement on cooperation in the field of science and technology was signed, in 2001 – in the field of nuclear safety, in 2002 - on trade in steel, in 2003 - on cooperation between Russia and Europol. In May 2001 and May 2003, the EU summits again declared the Union's commitment to the strategic partnership with Russia. Various joint statements and declarations appeared regularly: for example, on October 3, 2001 - on international terrorism and energy dialogue; on November 11, 2002 - on the Middle East (Кавешников, 2016: 535). In May 2001 the President of the European Commission Romano Prodi initiated the creation of a common European economic area. This idea was approved by both the Russian Federation and the EU and a special High-Level Group headed by Viktor Khristenko (Russia) and Christopher Patten (the European Commission) was created for its implementation (Браницкий, 2006: 280).

In 2003 the Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) in the format of different Ministers replaced the Cooperation Council, and the Cooperation Committee at the level of senior officials was created to help the PPC. The political dialogue was conducted not only by Foreign Ministers, but also by other high-ranking officials from both sides. (Борко, 2011: 540-541) In April 2004 the agreements on minimizing the negative consequences of the next expansion of the European Union for Russia were reached. (Браницкий, Платонов, 2008: 220-222) With the accession of Poland and the Baltic States to the Union, the length of the common border significantly increased, and the Kaliningrad region became a semi-enclave - with the acute problem of transit to this region from other Russian territories. In addition, the EU and Russia agreed on the most part of conditions for Russia's accession to the WTO.

On May 10, 2005 at the EU-RF summit in Moscow the Roadmaps were adopted for the four common spaces of the EU and Russia: economical one; the space of freedom, security and justice; one of external security; one of science, education and culture. The documents were signed by the President of the European Commission José Manuel Durão Barroso, the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Secretary General of the Council of the European Union Francisco Javier Solana de Madariaga, the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and the Prime Minister of Luxembourg Jean-Claude Juncker (in 2014–2019 - the President of the European Commission). Building these common spaces with harmonized (or at least compatible) regulatory practices and technical standards was considered by both sides as the main direction of practical cooperation between Russia and the European Union, leading in the future not only to a real strategic partnership, but also to the integration of the parties in certain areas. In particular, one of the goals was to create an open and integrated

market between Russia and the EU, based on common rules and regulatory systems, which meant joint administrative practice. It was intended to remove obstacles in four main areas of economic activity: cross-border trade in goods and services, the establishment and operation of companies, and the movement of individuals (Браницкий, Платонов, 2008: 222-235). These areas, in principle, correspond to the "four freedoms" in the EU (the free movement of goods, services, persons and capitals).

The common space of external security covered both the sphere of "old threats" and "new challenges" (international terrorism, national and religious extremism, drug trafficking) (Браницкий, Платонов, 2008: 245-251). The common space of freedom, security and justice (internal security) was designed to facilitate human contacts and travel between the Russian Federation and the EU. Here again we can see some counter-terrorism measures (and against all forms of organized crime). In addition, it was planned to improve the efficiency of judicial systems and develop cooperation in the field of justice (Браницкий, Платонов, 2008: 235-245). Finally, the common space for research, education and culture stimulated both the participation of Russian scientists in the European Union's scientific and technical development programs and the emergence of new exchange programs in the areas listed above (Браницкий, Платонов, 2008: 252-257). The concept of four common spaces meant Russia's adaptation to European norms and regulations (Чубарьян, 2006: 404-405).

18 sectoral dialogues were established for implementing the Roadmaps, mainly - in the economic sphere. Specific work in their framework was carried out by the relevant ministries and departments of Russia and the corresponding Directorates-General of the European Commission. The dialogue working groups included independent experts and business representatives, which reduced the degree of politicization in negotiations. Thus, the dialogues on space, customs regulation, cross-border cooperation, sanitary measures proved to be quite effective. In 2006 two important agreements were signed - on visa facilitation and readmission, in 2009 - on cooperation in the field of fishing and protection of the Baltic sea marine resources, in 2013 - on drug precursors (Кавешников, 2016: 535). The main working tool for interaction was the Permanent Partnership Council, which met quite often and in different formats (for example, decision-makers in the field of internal Affairs met in one format, while those responsible for energy issues met in another one).

In November 2006 the EU-Russia Helsinki summit agreed on a new format for the "Northern dimension". Two fundamental agreements were signed: the Framework document

and the Political Declaration. As a result, “Dimension” became a joint action program of the European Union, Russia, Iceland and Norway, their common project. Brussels considered cooperation with Moscow in the framework of the “Northern dimension” as a regional expression of the four common spaces of Russia and the EU concept and focused its main activities on the Russian Federation North-Western part. Meetings at the level of Foreign Ministers were held every two years, and the working group of representatives from the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland ensured continuity of work between summits. All projects were funded jointly (Антюшина, 2008: 313-314).

Business circles played an active role in the further development of mutually beneficial economic relations between Russia and the EU. In October 2005 the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) and the Coordinating Council of Business Unions of Russia (CCBUR) established the Business Cooperation Council and the Russian Business Unions Representation in the EU. Until the crisis in Ukraine trade and economic relations between the RF and the EU were actively developing: Russia was second in the list of the main trade partners of the European Union - after the United States and China. On the other hand, the EU accounted for more than a half of Russia's foreign trade turnover and almost three-quarters of accumulated foreign investments. However, the European Union has traditionally perceived Russia primarily as a supplier of raw materials and a market for its products. The energy sector became an area of acute disagreement due to the liberalization of the EU gas market and pressure on the existing system of long-term contracts. So, in January 2009 the crisis with the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine caused a serious blow to the strategic partnership of the parties. As a result, in March 2011 the European Union adopted so-called the Third energy package and began an active reform of its gas market, tightening pressure on Russia's “Gazprom” to limit its control over gas supplies (Kanevsky, 2013).

On November 30, 2007 the initial term of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement ended. However, it continues to operate (with an annual automatic extension), because a new basic agreement has not been reached. The principal decision about creating this document was taken at the EU-RF summit in London on October 4, 2005, but due to the veto of Poland and Lithuania, the start of negotiations was postponed until June 2008 (Борко, 2011: 539-540). By 2011 the 12 rounds of negotiations had taken place, during which approximately two-thirds of the chapters of the new agreement were agreed. But on the remaining issues, such as energy, competition policy, public procurement regime, state support rules, harmonization of technical standards and certification procedures, the negotiations reached on impasse and were eventually

frozen. The Partnership for Modernization program, initiated at the RF-EU summit on May 31 - June 1, 2010 in Rostov-on-Don, tried to give a new positive impetus to the relations between the parties (Кавешников, 2016: 537, 540). Despite the detailed action plan, this program became in practice only a political framework for a large number of projects already being implemented.

Before the Ukrainian crisis the multi-level system of partnership and cooperation institutions of the Russian Federation and the EU developed and adapted quite successfully to the new difficult conditions. At the same time, in matters of foreign policy and international security the views of the parties often did not coincide, which made it very difficult to find any compromise solutions. The European Neighborhood Policy, implemented since 2004, and the Eastern Partnership, initiated in 2008, drawn the European countries of CIS into the space of geopolitical competition between the EU and Russia. Moreover, Brussels declared that Eurasian integration was incompatible with European one. In the sphere of international conflict resolution the joint activities of Russia and the EU were relatively few. Thus, the parties participated in the development of a Roadmap for the settlement of the Palestinian conflict, interacted on the nuclear issues of Iran and North Korea (Кавешников, 2016: 538-541). In August 2008 the political relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation were complicated by the Caucasus crisis. The EU still defends the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity, while Russia not only formally recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but also included them in its sphere of influence. These steps significantly undermined the EU's confidence in Russian foreign policy. Finally, the Ukrainian crisis (that began in the fall of 2013) revealed all the systemic flaws in the European security architecture and effectively put an end to the EU-RF strategic partnership. The development of a new common foreign policy of the EU towards Russia is complicated by serious contradictions between two groups of member States: "russophiles" (such as Italy) and "russophobes" (such as Estonia) (Браницкий, 2011: 630).

### **3. Competition and Cooperation Between Russia and the EU in 2014-2021**

The current state of relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation is much more competitive than cooperative. The concept of strategic partnership between the parties remains in the past, and the entire system of institutions and the legal framework for interaction between Brussels and Moscow is gradually deteriorating. Russia turns towards Asia, implementing its own Eurasian integration project and developing partnership with China and



India. “Great Power Syndrome” plays its role because Russia is a rather big and powerful state. The Russian Federation considers different CIS states as its sphere of interests and watches the development of relations between them and the EU. The Russian President usually declares in his annual speech that Russia has prior relations with the CIS member-states. In reality CIS isn’t effective. But the Union state of Russia and Belorussia were established. The persistent reluctance to “let” Russia in Europe led to the creation of the Eurasia integration zone. The common economic area began its activity in 2012 - among Russia, Belorussia and Kazakhstan. Then the Eurasia Economic Union was created. The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union was signed on 29 May 2014 by the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, and came into force in 1 January 2015. It seems that now there is no place for creating any common spaces of the RF and the EU or “integration of integrations”.

The Russian Federation is not going to give up the status of a European power, which is confirmed by its return to the Council of Europe, active actions in the CEE region and attempts to deepen integration with Belarus within the framework of the Union State. In the Caucasus and the Balkans, in the Mediterranean, in Moldova and Ukraine, in the Baltic and the Black sea, in the Arctic and in Central Asia, Russia’s national interests are increasingly in conflict with the aspirations of the European Union. But in spite of political confrontation Moscow and Brussels develop bilateral cooperation in certain areas, not stop the main trade flows, carry out some projects of “Northern Dimension”. The focus of the power supply talks is the same as in many years before. The third energy package of the EU, approved in 2009, includes acts aimed at limiting rights of ownership and management of power supply, and transportation by vertically integrated companies. Separating transport nets from the power generation, the European Commission hopes to enhance competition, create conditions for new players to enter the market and cut prices for power. This is disapproved by Russia, which wants to have exceptions for “Gazprom” with regards to requirements stated in the third energy package (Lazareva, 2013).

On March 1, 2014 the Ukrainian crisis finally turned into an international one, which radically changed the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union. On 6 March, the EU summit adopted a three-step program of sanctions against Russia if it continues to occupy the Crimea. The first two parts of the sanctions were put into effect on March 17, including the cancellation of the annual Russia-EU summit scheduled for July in Sochi, and the termination of negotiations on visa facilitation and on a new basic agreement. In addition, the sanctions included a ban on entry into the EU for a group of officials and people close to the

Russian President, as well as the seizure of their assets stored in European banks. At the same time the European Union clarified that it remains ready to reverse its decisions and reengage with Russia (when it starts contributing actively and without ambiguities to finding a solution to the Ukrainian crisis). On April 28 the EU imposed economic sanctions, tightening the conditions under which Western banks provide loans to Russian companies, and imposing a ban on exports to Russia of dual-use technologies used in its military industries, and issued travel bans against a further 15 individuals. The EU also stated the aims of the sanctions as: they are not punitive, but designed to bring about a change in policy or activity by the target country, entities or individuals. The sanctions were expanded on July 25 to an additional 15 individuals and 18 entities, followed by an additional eight individuals and three entities on July 30. The third round of sanctions which included an embargo on arms (and related materials) and dual-use goods, technologies intended for military use or a military end user, a ban on imports of arms and related materials, control on export of equipment for the oil industry, and a restriction on the issue of and trade in certain bonds, equity or similar financial instruments on a maturity greater than 90 days, was introduced on July 31. And o

n August Moscow imposed retaliatory sanctions, banning the import of many types of agricultural products, raw materials and food produced in the EU (Борко, 2015: 80).

The European Union remains Russia's partner in the framework of "Northern Dimension". Here, priority is still given to developing economic cooperation in the region, promoting contacts between people, improving the efficiency of border management and infrastructure, modernizing the judicial system, fighting organized crime, ensuring the safety of citizens, solving environmental problems, including those related to nuclear safety, as well as cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and joint research activities, including in the health sector. Regular meetings of senior officials of EU member States and "Northern Dimension" partners are held to monitor joint projects and adjust them quickly. However, real cooperation is no longer taking place within the framework of action plans, but within the framework of thematic partnerships.

The sixth meeting of the Senior Officials of the renewed Northern Dimension took place in Brussels on 5 March 2019. It was attended by the Senior Officials of the four "Northern Dimension" partners: the European Union, the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland. Some Regional Councils, international financial institutions and other representatives involved in "Northern Dimension" cooperation also participated in the meeting. The Senior Officials

recognized the benefits and importance of the “Northern Dimension” policy, providing a unique multilateral framework to address practical common challenges in the “Northern Dimension” area on the basis of shared confidence and common responsibility, offering platforms for dialogue on multiple levels and in multiple fields of policymaking covered by the policy's framework document, strengthening parliamentary connections and private sector contacts.

The Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) provides a unique platform for concerted action in the area of health and social well-being through better collaboration and coordination of international activities, as well as by bringing together experts from the region to learn from each other. The NDPHS works in the areas of antimicrobial resistance, tuberculosis and HIV, non-communicable diseases, primary health care and occupational health. This job is very important in the current situation of Pandemic. (NDPHS, 2020). The future plans of the NDPHS include the ongoing work towards developing a common NDPHS framework for a horizontal program addressing population ageing and the continuing work of the Expert Groups towards improved health and social well-being (Chair's Conclusions, 2019).

The Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) tackles special issues arising from the northern environment: protection of waters (the Baltic Sea and the Barents Sea), nuclear safety and such special issues as waste management and district heating projects. There are some concrete achievements by the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP) in their environmental work in Russia. The key developments since 2016 include:

- (1) the completion of a new wastewater treatment plant in Kaliningrad (June 2017),
- (2) the completion of the works to upgrade wastewater treatment facilities at the Northern Wastewater Treatment Plant in St. Petersburg (October 2017),
- (3) the inauguration of a new wastewater treatment plant in Petrozavodsk (December 2017),
- (4) the completion of a district heating project in Kaliningrad (February 2019). (Chair's Conclusions, 2019) The NDEP Support Fund is financing environmental and energy-efficiency projects in North-West Russia and Kaliningrad, and nuclear waste projects (especially in the Kola Peninsula). The most concrete example of the environmental projects is the construction of the St Petersburg Wastewater Treatment Plants (NDEP, 2020).

The development of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC) means growth of the cultural and creative industry sectors in the area. The NDPC initiated studies in

creative innovation and cultural tourism (that has a lot of problems because of Pandemic) and linking these studies to hands-on work with practitioners, as well as the development of synergies with other cultural and creative initiatives in the region. The Secretariat of the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture is hosted in Riga. (NDPC, 2020). The Northern Dimension Business Council (NDBC) maintains a platform for interaction between private companies and regional authorities (Chair's Conclusions, 2019).

The Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL) tries to facilitate improvements of transport connections and logistics supporting international trade and people-to-people contacts with respect to vulnerable Northern environment, thus stimulating sustainable economic growth in the Northern Dimension region. (NDPTL, 2020) The partnership priorities for the coming years are:

- (1) meeting the need for the reduction of greenhouse gases and the promotion of ecologically friendly transport,
- (2) "Vision Zero" - Zero Road Deaths and serious injuries,
- (3) digitalization, including Intelligent Transport Systems and Global Satellite Navigation, robotization and automatization,
- (4) New Emerging trade routes, including connections to Asia,
- (5) sharing best practices on transport education (Chair's Conclusions, 2019).

In 2020 many joint projects, political contacts, cultural exchanges, and even economic cooperation have stopped due to the Pandemic. But there were some important political negotiations in a multilateral format. For example, on April 30, 2020 in Moscow during the Normandy format videoconference meeting of foreign ministers Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov asked his French and German colleagues to use their responsibility as parties to the Minsk Agreements and as the co-authors to influence Kiev and encourage it to stop avoiding requests to establish direct dialogue for resolving all the issues it has with Donetsk and Lugansk (Лавров, 2020).

We can see intensive contacts with Russia of some EU member States, especially economical ones. For example, the German economy is interested in a reliable supply channel for Russian natural gas. Germany's position was clearly confirmed by Chancellor Angela Merkel at a joint press conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on January 11, 2020. The German government, despite unprecedented pressure from outside, consistently supports the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 project (Нечаев, 2020).

On May 19, 2020 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had a telephone conversation with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio. They noted the effective coordination of work between the ministries and departments of the two countries in countering the coronavirus Pandemic. Luigi Di Maio, on behalf of the Italian Government, expressed gratitude to the Russian Federation for the assistance provided in the fight against the spread of this infection in the Apennines. When discussing the bilateral agenda, the ministers called for the resumption of full-scale Russian-Italian cooperation as the epidemiological situation normalizes. A joint note of the Italian Ministries of foreign Affairs and Defense gratefully reveals the specific content of Russian assistance in connection with the Pandemic (Разов, 2020).

There are many Euroregions (institutionalized form of cross-border cooperation) with Russian participation. Some of them are still alive. For example, Euroregion Baltic in the south-east of the Baltic Sea Region consists of eight regions. It was the first Euroregion with formal Russian participation (Kaliningrad Region), comprising the regions of both “old” (Denmark, Sweden) and “new” (Poland, Lithuania) the EU member States. This Euroregion involves both local and regional authorities, private and public sectors, and NGOs. The Euroregion Baltic President is its highest representative (and chairs the meetings of the Executive Board). He (or she) is authorized by the Executive Board not only to represent the Euroregion externally, but also to act on its behalf. The International Permanent Secretariat and the Euroregion Baltic regional secretariats assist him (or her) in the routine work. The Presidency and Vice-Presidency are held for one year. In 2015 and 2020 we can see Polish Presidency with Russian Vice-Presidency, and in 2016 - Russian Presidency (with Swedish Vice-Presidency) (Euroregion, 2020).

The main goals of the Euroregion Baltic are to implement joint initiatives aimed at strengthening and developing cooperation between local and regional authorities within the framework of the Euroregion, and to promote the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region, with a special focus on the South Baltic area. Also the Euroregion is responsible for implementing strategic initiatives complementing local and regional agendas of the member organizations, and pursuing organized exchange activities, promoting common interests of its member organizations and acting on their behalf towards the international, European and national institutions. The Euroregion Baltic 2020 Agenda sets out three main strategic objectives within this area:

- (1) implementation of The Euroregion Baltic Joint Development Program,

(2) accomplishment of prioritized institutional activities,

(3) development of platforms supporting other forms of cooperation and actors in the Euroregion Baltic area (Euroregion, 2020).

The Joint Development Program is an important element of cooperation: each partners defines which actions should be selected for realization. For example, the organization provides support to the Euroregion Baltic Water Forum. The second objective includes the investigation of a possible status of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation on the condition that it covers all the Euroregion Baltic partners and aims at involving more intensively experts in the work with the long-term objective of building a think-tank capacity of the Euroregion. Within this objective the Euroregion Baltic also supports the Youth Board in developing a flagship project proposal to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. With regards to the third objective, the Euroregion Baltic mainly supports the development of other platforms of cooperation by serving as an information broker and a match-making point in such areas, as environmental protection and energy saving, maritime safety, labour mobility, promotion of investments in transport infrastructure, the triple-helix cooperation, and facilitating border crossing with the Kaliningrad Region (Euroregion, 2020).

The development of a common EU foreign policy line towards Russia is complicated by significant differences in the approaches of individual EU member States. The main historical stereotype of Europeans in relation to Russia is the fear of a huge state that “dominates” over a small Europe (Музафаров, 2014). In principle, the choice should be made in favor of abandoning the “historical foreign policy” for the sake of the future (Браницкий, 2013). The experience of interaction between Russian diplomacy and the EU officials shows that Brussels experiences certain difficulties in building long-term partnerships with countries that do not consider the EU membership as the most important priority of their strategy in the international arena (Отношения, 2012). From the Russia's national interests point of view, the EU enlargement is a rather unpleasant process, but tolerable, unlike NATO expansion (Браницкий, 2012). And Brexit is very useful for relations between the EU and Russia, because it was the UK that often initiated new sanctions against Russia (just remember the Skripals case in 2018-2019). But, on the other hand, the Navalny case in 2020 has shown that Germany can initiate such sanctions too.

At the end of 2020 Russia reacted sharply to the interference of European Union countries in Belarusian affairs because Belorussian Coordination Council has been set up in

Vilnius, and National Anti-Crisis Management - in Warsaw. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the EU in some attempts to drive ‘a wedge’ between Belarus and the Russian Federation and in financial support to the Belarusian opposition. Moreover, he expressed the idea that “The West is completely unreliable and unable to negotiate” and “it is often tempted to play geopolitical games and put politics before the economy” (Foreign, 2020).

Transformation of the European political system, along with the development of global processes, creates new forms of international interaction characterized by multilateralism, participation of States and non-state actors, and network principles (Торкунов & Малыгин, 2016: 102). The new era of the US-Chinese bipolarity generates a crisis in which Russian and European interests objectively become closer to each other (Алексеевна, et al, 2014: 72). At the same time, we have to take into account both the growing influence of the Asian factor in the current development of Russia, and the powerful influence of the United States on the development of the European Union (Большая Европа, 2014: 695). Some experts recommend the EU to concentrate on common interests with Russia, not on common values. The law became the basis of European democracy, but for the most part of Russians, law is an abstraction devoid of importance (Багдасарьян Н. Г. et al, 2014: 175-176). On the other hand, Russia clearly focuses on developing cooperation with the EU, and the Brussels strategy focuses on transforming the whole of Greater Europe by its own standards. As a result, Russian pragmatism often collides with Brussels idealism (Расширение, 2006: 310). In the future Russia can take a more active part in the construction of Greater Europe – if not politically, then economically (Васильевич & Юрьевна, 2010: 500).

#### **4. Conclusion**

There are two main periods in the history of relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation: the path to strategic partnership (1991-2013) and the breakdown of ties (2014-2021). The institutional system of the cooperation initially included high-level summits, the Russia-EU Council, the Cooperation Council, and the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. In 2003 the Permanent Partnership Council replaced the Cooperation Council, and the Cooperation Committee was created to help the PPC. In 2005 the Roadmaps for the four common spaces of the EU and Russia were adopted: economical one; the space of freedom, security and justice; one of external security; one of science, education and culture. Building these common spaces with harmonized (or at least compatible) regulatory practices and technical standards were considered by both sides as the main direction of practical cooperation

between the RF and the EU, leading in the future not only to a real strategic partnership, but also to the integration of the parties in certain areas.

The main reason for the degradation of relations between the RF and the EU is the cardinal contradictions between the attempts to build a Greater Europe and restore Russia's role as a Great Power. The Eastern Partnership, initiated in 2008, drawn the European countries of CIS into the space of geopolitical competition between the EU and Russia. Moreover, Brussels declared that Eurasian integration was incompatible with European one. So a sharp fight for influence in Central and Eastern Europe began earlier than in 2014, when the Ukrainian crisis radically changed the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union. But in spite of political confrontation Moscow and Brussels develop bilateral cooperation in certain areas, not to stop the main trade flows, carry out some projects of “Northern Dimension”. There are many Euroregions with Russian participation, and some of them are still alive.

At the beginning of 2021 the relations between the EU and the Russian Federation are almost frozen. It's necessary to state that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is outdated now. But all negotiations on the new agreement stopped. A visa-free regime for crossing shared borders is another important issue in the dialogue between the RF and the EU (the length of the shared border is over 2000 km). Now these talks stopped too. In general, the EU declares that it's better to grant advantages to common people, and the government officials aren't the priority category to make their visa regime easier and simpler. The EU believes that scientists, students, reporters, businessmen, members of non-profit organizations play more important role in strengthening ties between nations than deputies and governmental officials.

Traditionally human rights are acute issues in the RF – the EU negotiations. The European Union officials insist that the Russian government applies pressure on its citizens to suppress activity of non-governmental organizations, freedom of speech and association. In turn, Russia also started to launch claims about human rights in the Baltic States. The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs declares about violation of Russian-speaking people (so-called non-citizens) in Latvia and Estonia, about some cases of xenophobia and racism, as well as about hardships of Gypsies and some categories of refugees in the EU. Almost 80% of the Russian territory lies in Asia, where European values are less popular. There are two main trends in the Russian public opinion: “the Eurasian one” (supported mostly by elderly people who believe that Russia must have its own individual way of development) and “the European one”



(supported mostly by younger people who consider Russia mainly as a European country and share western liberal and democratic values).

In reality there are some common interests of the EU and Russia: safety and stability in Europe, economic cooperation, cultural exchange. Two sides can fight against economic crises, terrorism, organized crime, illegal migration and environment pollution together. Economic relations are very important, especially for Russia, because the EU is the main trading partner dominating in Russian foreign trade. Also the EU is the main foreign investor of the Russian economy. And Russia is one of the key partners in trade for the EU, after the USA and China, dominating in the area of raw materials and power supply. The RF and the EU have strong historical and cultural ties. So it's necessary to believe in returning of Russia and the EU on the route to partnership in future.

**AUTHOR'S DECLARATION:**

**Conflicts of Interest:** There is no potential conflict of interest in this study.

## References

- Александров, О.Б. (2016). *Северное измерение» в политике ЕС/Европейская интеграция*. Аспект Пресс.
- Алексеевна, Н. Н., Миодраг, С. & Джон, J. (2014). *Россия и Европа. Энергия сотрудничества*. Вече.
- Антюшина, Н.М. (2008). *Северное измерение- инструмент стратегии ЕС по отношению к России/ Северная Европа. Регион нового развития*. Весь Мир.
- Васильевич, Р. А. & Юрьевна, В. Н. (2010). *История международных отношений*. ННГУ.
- Большая Е. (2014). *Большая Европа. Идеи, реальность, перспективы*. Весь Мир.
- Борко, Ю. А. (2001). *Отношения России с Европейским Союзом: текущие проблемы и дальние горизонты/Европейский Союз на пороге XXI века: выбор стратегии развития*. Эдиториал УРСС.
- Борко, Ю. А. (2011). *Отношения Россия – ЕС: история и современное состояние/Европейская интеграция*. Деловая литература.
- Борко, Ю. А. (2015). *Европейский Союз – Россия: прошлое, настоящее, будущее/Европейский союз в поиске глобальной роли: политика, экономика, безопасность*. Весь Мир.
- Браницкий, А. Г. (2006). *Erit una Europa?* ННГУ.
- Браницкий, А. Г. (2011). *История объединения Европы с древнейших времен до современности*. LAP.
- Браницкий, А. Г. (2012). *Расширение Евросоюза в начале XXI века: последствия, противоречия, перспективы /Европейский Союз в XXI веке: время испытаний*. Весь Мир.
- Браницкий А. Г. (2013), *Взаимоотношения России и Польши в начале XXI века в контексте глобализации и европейской интеграции / Выстраивая добрососедство: Россия на пространствах Европы*. Весь Мир.
- Браницкий, А. Г. & Платонов, И.В. (2008). *Европа: проблемы интеграции и развития*. НРОО: Фонд европейских исследований в Нижнем Новгороде.
- Багдасарьян Н. Г., Гаврилина Е. А. & Зенько А. А. (2014). *Россия и Европа. Россия в зеркале Европы*. Вече.
- Delors, J. (2006). *L'Europe tragique et magnifique. Les grands enjeux européens*. Saint-Simon.
- Dinan, D. (2004). *Europe recast. A History of European Union*. Palgrave.
- Европейского Союза. (2012). *Отношения России и Европейского Союза*. СПб.: Изд-во С.-Петербур. ун-та.
- EEAS11. (2019). Chair's conclusions – 6th senior officials' meeting of the renewed northern dimension. April 1, 2021, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/59094/Chair's%20Conclusions%20-%206th%20Senior%20Officials'%20Meeting%20of%20the%20Renewed%20Northern%20Dimension](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/59094/Chair's%20Conclusions%20-%206th%20Senior%20Officials'%20Meeting%20of%20the%20Renewed%20Northern%20Dimension).
- Euroregion Baltic. (2020). Cooperating across borders since 1998. April 2, 2021, <http://www.eurobalt.org/>.
- Нечаев, С. Ю. (2020). Интервью Посла России в Германии С.Ю. Нечаева газете Известия. March 14, 2021, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/de/-/asset\\_publisher/No2VLi5PHLYX/content/id/4040360](https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/de/-/asset_publisher/No2VLi5PHLYX/content/id/4040360).
- Чубарьян, А. О. (2006). *Российский европеизм*. ОЛМА-ПРЕСС.
- Лавров, С. В. (2020). Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В. Лаврова в ходе пресс-конференции по итогам видеоконференции министров иностранных дел нормандского формата. March 14, 2021, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/fr/-/asset\\_publisher/g8RuzDvY7qyV/content/id/4109746](https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/fr/-/asset_publisher/g8RuzDvY7qyV/content/id/4109746).
- Judt, T. (2010). *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945*. Vintage Books.
- Кавешников, Н. Ю. (2016). *Политико-правовая база отношений России и ЕС/ Европейская интеграция*. Аспект Пресс.

Kanevsky, P. (2013). Economic relations between Russia and the EU: In search of a common vision. March 5, 2021, <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/economic-relations-between-russia-and-the-eu-in-search-of-a/>.

Kłoczowski, J. (2010). *Nasza tysiącletnia Europa*. Świat Książki.

Кондратьева, Н. Б. (2008). *Регионы России и Европейского Союза на пути к строительству Общего экономического пространства / Н.Б. Кондратьева*. Европы РАН: Рус. сувенир.

Lazareva, M. (2013). The European Union and Russia: History of the relationship and cooperation prospects. March 5, 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/22036959/The\\_European\\_Union\\_and\\_Russia\\_History\\_of\\_the\\_Relationship\\_and\\_Cooperation\\_Prospets](https://www.academia.edu/22036959/The_European_Union_and_Russia_History_of_the_Relationship_and_Cooperation_Prospets).

Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации. (2020). Foreign minister sergey lavrov's interview with russian and foreign media on current international issues. November 12, 2020. [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/conflicts/-/asset\\_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/4429844?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_xIEMTQ3OvzcA\\_languageId=en\\_GB](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/4429844?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB).

Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации. (2020). Интервью Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В. Лаврова радиостанциям «Sputnik», «Комсомольская правда» и «Говорит Москва», March 14, 2021, [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/conflicts/-/asset\\_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/4381977?p\\_p\\_id=101\\_INSTANCE\\_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_xIEMTQ3OvzcA\\_languageId=ru\\_RU](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/4381977?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=ru_RU).

Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации. (2020). О телефонном разговоре Министра иностранных дел России С. В. Лаврова с Министром иностранных дел Италии Л. Ди Майо. March 30, 2021, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/it/-/asset\\_publisher/y8qQ47DsHQYD/content/id/4130803](https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/it/-/asset_publisher/y8qQ47DsHQYD/content/id/4130803).

Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации. (2020). О телефонном разговоре Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В. Лаврова с Министром Европы и иностранных дел Французской Республики Ж.-И. Ле Дрианом. March 30, 2021, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/fr/-/asset\\_publisher/g8RuzDvY7qV/content/id/4092936](https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/fr/-/asset_publisher/g8RuzDvY7qV/content/id/4092936).

МГИМО (2006). *Расширение Европейского Союза и Россия*. Деловая литература.

Музафаров А. (2014). *Россия и Европа. История, традиции и современность*. Вече.

NDPHS. (2020). The Northern dimension partnership in public health and social well-being. March 18, 2021, [https://www.ndphs.org/?about\\_ndphs](https://www.ndphs.org/?about_ndphs).

NDPHS. (2020). The Northern dimension partnership on transport and logistics. March 18, 2021, <http://www.ndptl.org/home>.

NDPHS. (2020). The Northern dimension environmental partnership. March 18, 2021, <http://www.ndep.org/>.

NDPHS. (2020). The Northern dimension partnership on culture. March 18, 2021, <https://www.ndpculture.org/ndpc>.

Рара, Е. (2006). *Storia dell'unificazione Europea. Dall'idea di Europa al Trattato per una nuova Costituzione Europea*. Bompiani.

Разов, С. С. (2020). Интервью Посла России в Италии С.С. Разова информационному агентству ТАСС. April 15, 2021, [https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/it/-/asset\\_publisher/y8qQ47DsHQYD/content/id/4097300](https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/it/-/asset_publisher/y8qQ47DsHQYD/content/id/4097300).

Rahr, A. (2002). *Russland und die EU/Russland: Kontinuität, Konflikt und Wandel*. Hanns Seidel Stiftung.

Шемятенков, В. Г. (2003). *Европейская интеграция*. Международные отношения.

Thomann, P. E. (2015). *Le couple franco-allemand et le projet européen : Représentations géopolitiques, unité et rivalités*. L'Harmattan.

Торкунов А. В. & Малыгин А. В. (2016). *Современные международные отношения*. Аспект-Пресс.