

Introduction: through a handbook

The study of EU-Russia relations

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The EU-Russian relationship, established in 1992 following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the European Union, has experienced more than its fair share of tribulations since then. There are many routes to understanding and accounting for the nature of relations between these two actors, whether based on developments internal to the EU, to Russia or both, or based on events external to and, sometimes, outside the control of either or both the EU and Russia. Certain events and processes inside the EU have had a transformative effect on its relations with Russia; witness the 1995 and 2004 enlargements, as well as certain institutional reforms and policy initiatives, most notably the European Neighbourhood Policy and particularly the Eastern Partnership. For Russia's part, changes in presidents and the accompanying processes, as well as the increased assertiveness of Russia following its improved economic standing, have all driven shifts in its relations with the EU. At the global, systemic level, NATO enlargements, the 1998–9 Kosovo crisis and the recognition of the latter as a sovereign actor by many EU and other states in 2008, and liberal interventionism generally are relevant foci. Equally, Russia's actions to maintain its influence in the post-Soviet region and its exploits in Syria cannot be ignored when trying to understand the deteriorated state of relations in 2021. Events largely outside the control of both the EU and Russia, yet inevitably affecting them and their relationship, also rightly occupy the attention of analysts and politicians. Thus, the United States' (declining) hegemony and the rise of actors from the global south and growing competition between the United States and China have presented both opportunities and challenges to the EU and Russia and inevitably, therefore, have impacted the relationship. Nevertheless, the EU-Russia relationship is a rich and varied one that is often reduced to its more contentious parts, that reductionism sometimes explained by, but more often obscuring, the numerous connections and interdependencies that exist in the relationship.

This edited collection seeks to capture the variety of understandings of the EU-Russia relationship that exist in analysis today and to explore the relationship in multi-temporal, multi-perspectival and multi-level terms. No single article or monograph can possibly capture all these dynamics in both comprehensive and intensive terms. As if to reinforce this idea, the very existence of this Handbook says much about the extent of EU-Russia relations and the difficulty entailed in capturing them. Little more needs to be said, therefore, about the rationale for producing this large collection. This chapter first explains the rationale and structure of the

Handbook as well as its limitations, revealing the complexity of the EU-Russian relationship. It then identifies the cross-cutting issues explored in the Handbook (and today's studies of EU-Russian relations) and, finally, summarises how contributors see the future of EU-Russian relations.

Editorial considerations

The central goal of this book is to illustrate the ambit and the edifice of EU-Russia relations, providing students of the relationship with a guide to the range of materials and arguments through which it can be explored. With that idea in mind, the book gathers various perspectives on EU-Russia relations from the scholars of the EU, Russia and beyond, dealing both theoretically and practically with many of the areas that constitute the relationship. The Handbook provides readers with numerous tools to deliver critical analysis of the diversity of interactions, which are all too often highly polarised and very much a moving target for those studying them and seeking to forecast developments with respect to them. As such, many of the contributing authors discuss future scenarios and identify those processes which will be necessary to implement if the EU and Russia are to work constructively to deepen their relations and bring Moscow and Brussels closer to each other.

Certain guiding principles were established early on to ensure that the Handbook would have relevance for a wide audience. That audience is seen as comprising advanced undergraduates; post-graduate students; and academics teaching on EU-Russia relations, comparative politics or other policy-linked courses. However, given the often febrile environment of these actors' political relations, we also sought to deliver something that would be of interest to policymakers and other practitioners, for whom education on this relationship is of great salience, as well as to journalists and people engaged in civil society dialogue and cross-border cooperation. Therefore, as the two editors, we asked authors to tread carefully with respect to assumptions of knowledge. Consequently, each chapter reflects the current status of academic and policy debates in the specific subject matter and identifies the major areas of cooperation, contradictions and division – and their causes. In delivering their understandings of where the relationship stands today and how that came to be, we also asked the contributors to deliver thoughts on future perspectives. This preoccupation with past, present and future will, we hope, provide a solid understanding of the area of the relationship in question. Each chapter also contains an extensive bibliography, which facilitates those desiring to delve into more detail on a given subject.

The book is structured into seven parts. The first, 'Evolving Relations', sets the scene for analysing EU-Russian relations. Chapters here review the historical aspects of the interactions between Russia and the EU, examine the decision-making and key players involved in the relationship on both sides (such as public institutions, business, societal players) and explore its normative aspects. An understanding of the longer context of the EU-Russia relationship is fundamental to grasping the state of any part of the relationship today. Equally, questions relating to normativity are pervasive and cross-cutting. Furthermore, analysis cannot proceed without a good understanding of the fact that a good number of actors play a part in the formulation of the relations and policy outcomes (or lack of them); the two chapters on actors and dynamics are therefore indispensable inclusions – and readings.

The second part covers the theoretical and methodological aspects of how EU-Russian relations can be researched and what varying approaches tell us about the future of this interaction. The list of topics is far from exhaustive, but it covers those most essential and promising for research on the interactions. These chapters are devoted to realism (with all its sub-currents),

varying perspectives on power, (neo-)institutionalism, Europeanisation, constructivism and postcolonial theory, as well as economic methods of analysis. This section presents a useful set of instruments for both the analysis and prognosis of the relationship. At the same time, each author raises questions about the limits of the utility of these instruments, suggests future research agendas and encourages dialogue between/among different approaches. As the contributors to this section implicitly make clear, it is worth emphasising the rich vein of empirics that the EU–Russia relationship provides for scholars theorising international relations and accordingly the editors’ view that more needs to be done to reconcile the area studies and international relations divide.

Having established what might be considered the necessary foundations and lenses through which to analyse EU–Russia relations, the three subsequent parts of the Handbook move on to cover different types of activities in those relations. The third part includes chapters on the political and security relationship, human rights, cyber-security, interaction in the field of freedom, security and justice, and legal approximation, as well as the difficulties involved in synchronising EU–Russian relations with those between Russia and the individual member states. The fourth part dwells on economic relations. It includes chapters on general trade and investment issues as well as on energy, science and technology and the policy of sanctions, which has, regrettably, acquired salience in more recent years. Conventional wisdom would suggest that this fourth section covers the ‘meat’ of the EU–Russia relationship. In fact, the chapters here speak far less of imperatives than might be expected. The fifth part of this volume considers in detail the plurality of EU–Russian social relations, which are frequently underestimated. Chapters here are also key to revealing the complexity of the interactions and the fact that much of the relationship is preserved through even the most challenging of times. A good deal of the work here demonstrates a more cooperative nature than the overall image of the relations that usually prevails and constitutes a reminder to consider the multi-level basis of any international relationship. This part additionally reveals the heterogeneity of the EU *and* Russia. It includes chapters on civil society contacts, academic cooperation, social media and epistemic communities.

The two final parts look at two different arenas for EU–Russia relations, which we define as regional and global levels. These two parts illustrate multiple arenas where the EU and Russia interact or are impacted by their separate relations with third countries. The part on regional relations covers the areas of rare cooperation and efficiency preserved (cross-border cooperation, Northern Dimension), the territories where cooperation has ambiguous paths and results (Kaliningrad, the Arctic), and the highly contentious and burning issues of relations in the shared/contested neighbourhood. Finally, the global part incorporates chapters on Russia and the liberal world order, the relationship in the EU–US–Russia triangle, the interaction of Brussels and Moscow in Asia and in the Middle East, as well as relations between Russia and the EU in various multilateral bodies (ranging from the UN through the OSCE to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation). While developments inside Russia and the EU impact their relations with each other, they should not be seen through the prism of that relationship alone. Indeed, perhaps one of the pitfalls of a Handbook such as this is to suggest that the relationship is what matters most; it is all too easy to forget that the EU and Russia are distinct actors, each pursuing their own objectives and interests and each facing internal and external pressures that drive their actions and in which the other actor is not necessarily the primary consideration. That either the EU or Russia should be egocentric enough to view the other’s actions only through the lens of the impact on them is understandable, but the wider (or narrower) context should not escape the attention of analysts.

The two editors see this structure as essential for the detailed analysis of EU–Russia relations but also understand its limitations. For example, the complexity of the EU as an actor

is reflected in its institutions (the first part) but also in the fluid relations between the EU and national levels (the third part) and the intricacy of its participation in various multilateral fora (the seventh part). Similarly, economic relations can be treated as a part of transnational relations, together with different types of societal engagements between the EU and Russia, whereas sanctions are politically motivated and hence form an important aspect of part three. Meanwhile, norms and identity are an integral aspect of nearly all the parts and chapters of the Handbook. Finally, it is difficult to disassociate relations in the neighbourhood from political or economic relations between the EU and Russia. Even while acknowledging all this, analysis requires structuration and, inevitably, *some* simplification if understanding of the relationship in question is to follow. Equally, some onus must be placed on the reader, and we trust our readership to make the necessary connections.

Some other challenges involved in the production of the Handbook do warrant explication at this stage. A significant challenge came in the fact of the degraded state of the EU-Russian political relationship and what that means for analysts and their deliberations. For, with respect to a polarised relationship in which events, processes and even their definitions are disputed, editors and authors face the challenge of identifying ‘facts’ and supporting evidence to deliver accurate and persuasive analysis. In an attempt to ensure a balance of arguments, this collection brings together a wide range of scholars. Those scholars also cover a range of professional experience and disciplinary backgrounds. However, while it is worth emphasising that one of the editorial priorities was to assemble Russian as well as EU/Western scholars, it is also worth expressing our understanding that balance is not synonymous with neutrality or impartiality. Indeed, delivering neutral or impartial arguments (which, depending on your theoretical lens, may or may not ever be achievable) may not be desirable if a competing priority is to deliver understanding not only of the EU-Russia relationship but of the analysis that interprets and even mediates it. Thus, we leave our readership to decide whether balance was achieved overall but reject criticism of any failure to achieve neutrality or impartiality in each and every chapter.

Another challenge was identifying a full list of sub-fields in EU–Russia relations and finding authors to cover all these aspects. One does not need to look further than the Table of Contents to see that this was a challenge we did not fully meet. For certain subjects, scholars were so much in demand that we could not secure their time, hybrid threats being a case in point. Thus, certain gaps remain, whether in terms of an entire aspect of the relationship or one ‘side’s’ perspective on it. Some authors decided not to contribute their piece to the final Handbook, citing profound differences in views with those of the two editors. While respecting this choice, we consider it counterproductive for the study of EU–Russia relations as a whole and certainly antithetical to our underlying determination to build at least a scholarly bridge with respect to them. Moreover, that case was also revealing of the reluctance of some analysts to engage in debate about what constitutes evidence and to substantiate their argument in such a way as to make it compelling. We also regarded this as a micro-cosmic illustration of the (lack of) dialogue in the relations, which complicates finding solutions to the current impasse.

Certain decisions were under our control and, in the interests of perhaps sparking further debate about the role of academic work, some explanation of our rationale for excluding some subject matter is warranted. Some topics constituted moving targets such that their inclusion here would have nullified our attempts to future-proof the chapters and the collection as a whole: the significance of the EU and Russia in sub-Saharan Africa or the gender agenda being good illustrations. The editorial perspective was that the academic work included here had to be grounded in the longer view. Most of the chapters end with some attempt to deliver forecasting about the possible future or futures of the relationship, but the line between forecasting and speculation, however fine, does exist, and was walked carefully here on the basis that some

distance between events and their analysis should be in place in a volume that seeks to achieve what this one does. This should not, therefore, be read as a criticism of those seeking to deliver analysis of ongoing events. Whether these deliberate exclusions are viewed as to the credit rather than the detriment of the volume as a whole, we leave, again, to the readership but trust that any such conversations will take place within the context of discussion of the objectives of this – or any – (hand)book.

Some topics are inescapable. It would have been surprising had the conflict in and over Ukraine, including Crimea, *not* been a reference point for a good number of the chapters. In fact, 2014 events and after in Ukraine were identified, whether implicitly or explicitly, by very many of our contributing authors as variously, a turning point, a black swan event, a symptom of larger issues or a cause of others. Our expectation that the Western Balkans would also arise in multiple different chapters was not met, however. Time will tell whether this is a justifiable omission or whether it is an example of scholars sometimes not seeing the early or even current signs of a problem brewing.

A final note here is that at the time of manuscript completion, the United Kingdom was still in the EU. Thus, references to 28 member states or to the United Kingdom as a member are now inaccurate. What the United Kingdom's departure means for EU-Russia relations is a matter of speculation at this point, but it is unlikely that any impact will be felt in the very near future, although the gap left by the United Kingdom's departure in relation to the CFSP and CSDP is a cause of much speculation regarding how the EU will proceed here (Mills 2019).

Most chapters were completed early in 2020, but for various reasons, they went to copyediting and printing only towards the end of that year. Many things have happened at different levels in the meantime that could have changed the dynamics of EU-Russia relations. At the global level, we all faced the threat of the pandemic, coupled with the United States and China undermining various international institutions (most notably the World Health Organisation) for the coordination of efforts against Covid-19. Additionally, the EU's initial lack of internal solidarity was exploited by the Kremlin in propaganda terms, frittering away a valuable opportunity to show fellowship in EU-Russia relations, further cementing distrust. At the regional level, the space of the shared and competing neighbourhood has presented both sides with multiple challenges (the more acute being the conflict in Belarus between regime and civil society following the August 2020 presidential elections and the reignition of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh). At the level of EU-Russian relations, the poisoning of a Russian opposition leader, Alexey Navalny, led to a serious rift in Russian-German relations, further undermining EU supporters of pragmatic engagement with Russia. The EU also advanced its Green Deal, which is to redefine EU-Russian energy relations in the short to medium term, a challenge that Russia is still to grasp. While undeniably important, these developments did not *alter* the dynamics in EU-Russia relations, which continue to be characterised by disengagement. Rather, already existing trends and processes were simply reaffirmed, both parties maintaining a holding pattern – waiting for precisely what is a matter of conjecture, as the chapters that follow make clear.

Cross-cutting issues

There are at least seven cross-cutting issues that run both through the development of the EU-Russia relationship and this volume. The first is that of Russia's identity, on the one hand, and the EU's claim that it represents Europe, on the other hand. In his chapter on Europeanisation, Flenley accurately lays out the dilemma of Russia being treated as a part of Europe or as 'Europe's defining "other"'. Both editors subscribe to the view that, on the basis of history and

culture, Russia is very much a part of Europe. Therefore, we resisted, where possible, applying 'European' to the EU only in such a fashion as to exclude Russia. But we also recognise that this is not a universal viewpoint, especially among policymakers. Moreover, it also depends on whether Europe is defined in geographical, cultural or political (normative) terms. At the same time, as the Morozov, De Bardeleben and Pavlova chapters make clear, the question of belonging to Europe has defined to a great extent Russia's present relations with the EU but also the position the EU has taken vis-à-vis Russia. The discussion on Russia's European credentials is not only about identity but also ultimately about power relations (see Casier's chapter), about the EU's ability to exert normative influence over Russia and the readiness of the latter to accept this influence.

The second cross-cutting issue, which comes out very vividly in Fernandes's and Schmidt-Felzmann's chapters, is how heterogeneous and porous the EU is. This is all but a truism now, but few EU partners reflect this heterogeneity of the EU better than Russia, which for years has been reproached for trying to drive a wedge between EU member states and Brussels and so to challenge the EU's consensus. It is for this reason that the potency of EU institutional changes is so often measured against the lessons from EU-Russian relations. It has also been argued that Russia remains a(n unflattering) mirror for the EU (David and Romanova 2019). Yet, tensions in relations with Russia, resulting from confrontation in the neighbourhood, Russia's challenge of international norms and its crackdown on democratic freedoms (including the 2020 poisoning of Navalny as well as the lack of progress in pacifying, if not resolving, the situation in Eastern Ukraine) have resulted in the EU managing a considerable consolidation of its Russia policy.

More recently, Moscow has been accused of exploiting the EU's porosity, meddling in the EU's internal affairs and using hybrid measures to threaten Brussels and the member states (ranging from disinformation, through alleged attempts to influence national elections, often via social media [see David's chapter], to cyber attacks [see Chernenko] and attacks on individuals in the EU, such as was seen in Salisbury, England, in 2018 [see David 2018]). These trends also reflect a more universal development wherein international relations are increasingly about transnational engagements and cannot be limited to intergovernmental dialogue. To illustrate this further, Russia has long expressed concerns that the EU tries to influence its internal politics (see Belokurova and Demidov). This topic is further developed in the part on societal interaction between the EU and Russia, which demonstrates that EU-Russia relations comprise considerably more than that which is encapsulated at the intergovernmental level alone.

Relatively speaking, Russia is a unified actor, but it cannot be forgotten either that, notwithstanding President Putin's policy of reinforcing the authority of the federal centre, Russia is a federal state covering a vast swathe of territory, with various regions facing quite distinct challenges (including in relation to the EU; see the separate Yarovoy and Joenniemi chapters). Moreover, Romanova's chapter draws attention to the multiplicity of Russian interests involved in the development of the policy on the EU, although they are not entirely visible, given that the current stage of confrontation with the West has resulted in the (willing or otherwise) consolidation of Russian elites under the aegis of patriotic conduct. In addition, Russia also promotes Eurasian integration, which theoretically should lead to the emergence of a supranational level, similar to that of the EU (see Kofner and Erokhin, part four).

The third cross-cutting issue is that EU-Russia relations have always been a combination of cooperation/fostering interdependence and competition/mutual alienation. It would be a gross simplification to say that the 1990s were about cooperation, while today's interaction is only about drifting apart. Even in the mid-1990s – as the chapter by Khudoley and Raś indicates – Russia demonstrated some resistance to the EU's normative pressure. Similarly, contributors

specify instances of today's cooperation ranging from high-level political issues (like Iran or the Middle East in Forsberg's contribution) through energy cooperation and selective climate change engagement (see Kustova) to economic (Connolly and Deak's chapter) and societal interaction (part five), as well as regional engagements (Lanko; Yarovoy; and Sergunin, all part six). The permeability of borders for both positive and negative interdependencies (be it trade, educational exchanges and civil society dialogues or climate challenges, terrorism and pandemics) compel the EU and Russia to cooperate on common (but internal for each) threats. At the same time, alienation and mutual suspicion frustrate such cooperation. Hence, we can discern a shifting pattern of cooperation vs confrontation, but both components have featured throughout the years of EU-Russian relations. Geographical proximity and cultural closeness as well as economic relations ensure the two components will continue to feature.

Yet, at the same time, the EU and Russia have never developed a cooperation reflex; their interaction remains secondary to their other formats of participation in world affairs, in particular, to the dynamic patterns of their separate interactions with the United States and, more recently, China. One possible reason may be – the realist would say – that this cooperation has never been essential for the survival of both actors; institutionalists would stress the weakness of existing structures of cooperation, whereas constructivists are likely to emphasise the problematics of identity, and postcolonial scholars would reveal power relations embedded in past interactions (see part 2 for more details).

The fourth cross-cutting issue of this Handbook is an acute contradiction between the fundamentals of EU-Russian relations and EU-promoted selective engagement. At the level of fundamentals, the EU demands respect for norms and values as they are enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) as well as for the international liberal order and rules-based governance (EU 2016). Russia for its part requests equality as expressed in its major conceptual documents and respect for international law in its classical interpretation (Russian Federation 2016) but also revision of some norms so that Russia is granted a seat at the governing table, commensurate with the way it perceives itself (Romanova 2018). Indeed, Russia's perception that it is insufficiently integrated into European structures has resulted in fierce discussions about Russia's inclusion/exclusion (see, for example, Pavlova's or Dekalchuk's chapter) and the readiness of Russia to challenge the liberal order. Despite seeking to engage selectively, the sustainability of each actor's engagement is doubtful at best. Any type of selective engagement is frequently conceptualised as a zero-sum game or proffered in a partial fashion, either furthering the EU's values' and norms' agenda or representing Russia's view that there is no sustainable solution without its full involvement and equal participation.

The fifth cross-cutting topic is that of economic rationality. It has been another truism to talk about the importance of EU-Russian economic relations for both actors, as well as about the asymmetries in these relations where the EU makes up the biggest share of Russia's trade and investments, whereas Russia is indispensable for the EU's energy supply. Yet various contributions to this volume (Connolly and Deak; Kashin; Kustova; Timofeev) argue that structural changes are transforming what the parties have frequently perceived as their unilateral dependencies into a system where each is increasingly *insignificant* for each other economically. The increasing power of Asia in the global economy drives Russia to pivot eastwards (as do EU sanctions), increasing its trade with that region. The EU has embarked on energy transition, to decrease its reliance on Russian gas, but particularly oil and coal and potentially nuclear fuel. Hence, significant changes are eroding what many still perceive as the solid basis of EU-Russian relations.

The sixth cross-cutting issue is that of how the EU and Russia talk past each other while using the same terms. The ubiquitous mentions of 'equality' are one illustration: for Russia, it is

about the ability to participate in (and veto) key decisions; for the EU, it is more about the ability to express views and be heard but also to abide by the decision of the majority (of democratic nations). The views on multilateralism also support this distinction between the EU's insistence on the will of the majority vs the right of Russia to decide and have a final say on major issues (see in particular the chapters of Kropatcheva; Utkin; and David and Deyermond). The EU and Russia also diverge on Europeanisation, which is about technical adjustments for Russia and about deep values' transformation for the EU (see Flenley's chapter). Both the EU and Russia frequently appeal to international law but differ on the interpretation. Similarly, the EU and Russia have different inclinations to accept the rulings of international bodies. These contradictions come up particularly vividly in the chapters by Chernenko, Danilov, Delcour, David and Deyermond, Kropatcheva, and Utkin. The fact that the EU and Russia use the same words to advance different agendas, with Russia increasingly frequently reinterpreting conventional (that is, Western, many Russians would say) definitions does little to simplify communication between Moscow and Brussels. At the opposite end of the scale, of course, is the difference in the EU and Russian discourse when addressing the same issues. The words that are used to describe 2014 events in Crimea (annexation in the West and repatriation and legitimate expression of people's will in Russia) are the best illustration.

The discourses advanced by the EU and Russia of course reflect many of the cross-cutting issues outlined previously. Where possible, the editors tried to emphasise these divergences, something aided by the fact that the authors represent so many different nationalities (though not, we would like to underline, necessarily what might be 'their' dominant national position) such that they inevitably draw on different official discourses, particularly, in different languages, English and Russian being the main.

The final cross-cutting issue is that of false binaries in EU-Russian relations, either for the sake of easing analysis or with the intention of establishing right from wrong, creating various superior and inferior categories. Kratochvil, in his chapter, for example, reminds us of the tendency to classify the EU as a postmodern actor vs modern Russia (see also Joenniemi's chapter). Here, the multiplicity of possible definitions of a concept creates problems. For instance, the notion of the EU as a postmodern actor can be critiqued for ignoring its continuing developments as a military actor, while other definitions would allow that the status of post-modernity is not contingent upon wielding only soft power. When it comes to Russia and soft power, its credentials in this regard are easily dismissed by those for whom soft power is writ in liberal notions of it, denying the possibility of an actor such as Russia reinterpreting and providing an alternative vision of what it might mean to be such a power. Values are another case in point, all too often in the EU case treated as separable from interests, while Russia pursues interests that lack a foundation in values. In reality, of course, values and interests should be regarded as two sides of the same coin.

What future for EU-Russian relations?

For all the differences identified between the EU and Russia in terms of identity, interests and institutions, there are two striking similarities between them which should be borne in mind. First, both the EU and Russia seem to believe that time is on their side. The inherent belief of the EU is that the current international liberal order is fair and has to be preserved in its current form, as all actors are fairly accommodated in it. All divergences are treated as a betrayal of the compact begun with the Helsinki Final Act and cemented with the fall of the Soviet Union, meaning that the EU continues to hope the leadership of its partners (Russia in this case) will change, their civil society will develop and they will eventually embrace the

order in the way it was imagined they would in 1991 (see, for example, EU 2016). Russia, by contrast, believes the world is in the process of dramatic change, the West in decline while other alternative voices are finally being heard. Hence, Russia merely has to see how matters will rearrange themselves and will eventually carve out a place which properly reflects its status (see, for example, Lavrov 2019).

The second similarity follows from the first. Neither actor has a long-term plan of how to (re)construct relations with the other. The EU's mantra that there is no return to business as usual is met in Russia with a simple statement that nobody in Moscow wants that. The EU also recognises a possibility for 'selective engagement' with Russia over matters of EU interest (Mogherini 2016: 33). Russia for its part declares that it is ready to cooperate pragmatically whenever and wherever the EU decides to do so, that it never halted relations and is ready to engage with the EU whenever the latter is ready for it (see, for example, Chizhov 2019). Hence, both sides are short on strategic thinking and goals and employ tactics to manage relations that are relics from the past. The European Parliament tried to alter this tendency recently, urging the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the Council 'to devise a new strategy for the EU's relations with Russia' (European Parliament 2020) and thus to give a long-term perspective to this interaction. Yet it lacked innovation, limiting itself to a reference to values and the cooperation of civil societies, a reiteration of the pattern of selective engagement already present. Nor does it answer the question of how this cooperation can happen in conditions when Russian authorities continue to limit the space for transnational civil society interaction (for a recent illustration, see Putin 2020).

Practically all the Handbook contributors are rather pessimistic about the prospects for EU-Russian relations. In a short-term perspective, the only possible positive scenario is the maintenance of the status quo, neither side wanting to return to business as usual; mutual deterrence and selective engagement are likely features of this status quo, as is the perception of the possibility of a further decrease of economic and political relations. One major concern is how to prevent further worsening of the relations. In the areas where cooperation has been preserved (such as cross-border cooperation and the Northern Dimension, energy and the environment, education and science), no qualitative change is expected. Rather, most authors expect the continuation and extension of those projects previously launched or the instrumental use of international institutions with no qualitative overhaul. The overall lack of trust and the (perceived) difference in priorities and vision also mean that cooperation in potentially mutually beneficial areas, such as cyber security or the Middle East will (continue to) stall. At the same time, the suspension of various regular institutional bodies (summits, cooperation councils, dialogues) means that the parties are losing both the habit and skill of cooperating, especially at the transgovernmental and transnational levels, while the efficiency of that interaction which is preserved suffers. This therefore does not bode well for the medium- to longer-term perspectives.

Contributors have identified at least three factors that could change this dynamic in the long run. The most frequently cited one is changes within Russia itself. They are expected to come as civil society in Russia grows more mature and hence demands changes from state institutions. These expectations also rely on the fact that Russia's identity remains profoundly European, as the contributions of Morozov, DeBardeleben, Deriglazova, Flenley or Pavlova clearly indicate, and Russia's normative offensive can, therefore, be tamed relatively easily should the political will to that effect arise. While some continue to believe that the EU should facilitate those changes, most contributors agree that this is the road that Russia has to take by itself at its own pace, meaning the EU would do better to adopt a wait-and-see attitude rather than risk impelling internal changes in Russia. As studies attest, Russian society is indeed increasingly unhappy with the course of Russia's development, but that does not mean that

Russian people are ready to protest (akin to their Ukrainian, Belarus or Kyrgyz peers) or go into politics to change that, nor is this critical attitude transferred to Russia's foreign policy (Kolesnikov and Volkov 2019).

The second – although less plausible – factor that might transform the present EU–Russia relationship is a fundamental change in the EU (see Morozov this volume). This factor manifests itself in the rise of populist movements and growing euroscepticism; the United Kingdom's exit and the normative offensive of some EU member states, like Hungary or Poland. There are also reasons to claim that the present EU unity (member state and institutional) vis-à-vis Russia is reinforced as much by the Lisbon Treaty institutional changes as by the perception of threat coming from Russia. If the latter recedes, the EU's divergence might lead to some changes in its relations with Russia. In this respect, the evolution of member states' positions in the context of other developments is of a crucial nature. The events of 2020 demonstrated that an assertive Russian domestic and foreign policy leads to the EU consolidating its Russia policy along censorious lines.

Finally, the black swan scenario, mostly including threats to both the EU and Russia, also cannot be excluded. This scenario could be linked to some global and structural, mostly catastrophic, changes or palpable threats to both the EU and Russia that will force them to unite. Naturally, as with any transformative, intervening factor, it is next to impossible to identify at present. This factor could potentially make EU–Russia relations vital for both the EU (including its national capitals) and Russia, something that the relations have always missed. Yet 2020 also demonstrated that an existential threat to the population, that is, a deadly pandemic, does not inexorably lead to any fundamental change in EU–Russian relations; rather it creates competition and alienation in new areas (vaccine development and certification). Hence, it appears that a threat with the capacity to compel a reassessment of the relationship will have to be exponentially larger, potentially on a scale to threaten the very survival of the state machine and the fundamentals of society.

Whatever the driving factors for changes are, the evidence from this Handbook suggests that, in the long run, the relations will be more pragmatic and interest based, less value driven relative to the expectations of the 1990s, more transactional than transformative. A common long-term understanding of these interests remains to be achieved. The emphasis on interests is a sign of recognition that EU–Russia relations are driven not only by internal processes in both the EU and Russia but also by global dynamics and balances of various powers as well as structural issues. Hence, irrespective of who holds the Kremlin office, whatever the changes in the civil society of Russia, or how the EU evolves, some things are projected to stay the same. It also seems vital for a deepening of cooperation that, when designing this long-term agenda, the parties fully respect each other's values and differences as well as practise equality; both parties have to feel fully integrated in the shared arrangements and therefore committed to their implementation; respect for the right of neighbours to decide on the course that they take domestically or internationally has to be upheld, while the efforts of the sides to contribute to the resilience of those actors are to be recognised. The history of Europe and that of EU–Russian relations will remain a very important resource for both grounding the respective positions and for building a new quality in the mutual relationship.

Yet this development will – if indeed it ever does – take place in a different environment. Contributors diverge on the share of politics and economics in future relations. Some view geographical proximity and the density of economic and trade links as a safety net that will preserve a certain degree of cooperation in the relations. Others remind us that the structure of Russian external trade has been changing in the direction of mutual disengagement, intimating that the relationship in the longer term will concentrate mostly on political issues. Furthermore,

a heightened global perspective will apply to this relationship. The EU and Russia might find themselves in a situation where they help each other balance the power of China, shying away from any confrontation between the United States and China, all the better to advance their economic relations in the world. An EU-Russian partnership might be essential to drive a global climate deal, while US-Russia security relations will affect the EU-Russian political dialogue (see Danilov; Freire herein). Finally, relations will develop in a situation of further integration in the information and cyber spaces, which makes transgovernmental interaction denser and less predictable and verifiable.

Our contributors also outline a variety of policy consequences, stemming from the research in their issue areas. In the short term, most of them relate to how to construct the relationship in a situation where trust is lacking. Most contributors argue for the need to re-open institutional contacts. Some recommendations stemming from the practice of those specific relations that are preserved, that is, cross-border engagements, academic cooperation or expert consultations, are also worth considering. In the longer term, most recommendations revolve around the need to develop a shared vision (of interests), which has to precede the institutional overhaul of the relations. Yet institutions are necessary to guarantee both the realisation of this vision and the equality of the interactions (as Entin and Kalinichenko illustrate in the case of legal approximation). Finally, a piecemeal approach, which contributes to the building of trust at various levels of the relations (see Kofner and Erokhin as an example) and in different fora remains the most frequent option our contributors suggest.

Both editors hope that this book will inspire more policy suggestions that will eventually lead to the improvement of EU-Russia relations. We trust, too, that it provides the necessary kindling for those students looking for research agendas to pursue, perhaps even playing some small part in the development of the analysts and policymakers of EU-Russia relations in the future.

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