

War and Peace in the 21st Century: RUSSIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION. A KEYSTONE RELATIONSHIP

Barcelona, 17th January 2009

Conclusions

Experts gathered in the seminar highlighted different fields of interdependence between Russia and the European Union, which are not limited to energy, and include in particular the fields of economy (business, trade and investment) and security. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia opted for liberalisation of its political and economic system and, despite its current trend towards autocratic rule, it can not turn the clock back and attempt to follow 'the Chinese way'. It therefore needs Europe to consolidate its process of modernisation. Interdependence also means that both sides' international role and their opportunity to impact on some global issues depend, to a large extent, on closer cooperation.

A number of factors in the international context provide opportunities for strengthened relations and mutual cooperation between Russia and the EU. A window of opportunity may have opened for a qualitative change in the bilateral relationship with the combination of the economic crisis (and the accompanying low prices for hydrocarbons) - which will force both sides to reconsider their existing growth models; the inauguration of a new American administration, likely to revise its relations with both sides; and the clear expression of the limits of Russia's unilateral actions, such as the August 2008 military operation in Georgia or the gas dispute with Ukraine. Incidentally, the 2010 Spanish Presidency of the EU will provide an opportunity to advance some of the ideas expressed in the seminar.

The main task that was identified in the seminar was the **reestablishment of confidence between Russia and the European Union** as a key element to develop stable, long term cooperation. The ideas mentioned in the debates can be grouped under three headings:

1. **Making the right choices:** Concerning Russia, it should decide whether it wants to be a new world power competing with the EU for global and regional influence, or a privileged and strong partner of the EU; and whether it prefers to 'divide and rule' or to support a strong, cohesive Union. As for the EU, the main choice to be done is whether to cooperate with a rising Russia, or to confront it. Or, to put it in other words, to consider Russia as a threat or as a member of the European family.
2. **Solving internal issues:** In order to be able to have a fruitful relationship with the EU, Russia needs to complete the modernisation of its governance, economy and society, to firmly establish the rule of law and to confront the thorny issues of its past - to do its *devoirs de mémoire*. The EU, in turn, needs to achieve a common approach to relations with Russia, which can only come when a stronger CFSP is in place and the EU has a solid common energy policy. NATO plays an indirect but crucial role in the relationship, and a revision of the enlargement strategy - which can represent a pause, but also entail the change in the current 'NATO first, EU later' sequence - in the light not only of the implications for Russia's security concerns - which could be addressed by a new, less threatening interpretation of article 5 of the NATO Treaty - but also of the other implications of NATO membership - in issues such as stabilisation and democratisation, consolidation of civilian rule over the army, or the consolidation of democratic values - is crucial to the whole EU - Russia relationship.
3. **Engaging in a renewed bilateral dialogue:** Mutual sensitivities from both sides were proved to be at the basis of many of the problems that have jeopardized the bilateral dialogue for years. Participants underlined the need of a new strategic partnership as proposed by President Medvedev in Evian, which might be helped by the celebration of a big international conference between Russia, EU and United States in order to settle the new European Security Order. The dialogue could also lead to a return to rules and institutions where both Russia and the EU feel comfortable. Finally, the dialogue could also result in a joint approach to the construction of a new multilateralism, as it will be needed to manage a new, multipolar world.