

## Living in the “area of vital interest” for Russia

Friday, 8 October 2021

*Venue:* Representation of the European Commission in Spain  
Paseo de la Castellana, 46, 28046 Madrid

*Language:* English with simultaneous translation

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It has been 30 years since Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia - the six European countries of the former Soviet Union - have become independent, at least formally. But the full exercise of their sovereignty is still undermined by Moscow's actions. The trouble is that these states also make up the strip of European territory considered by Russia as its lifeline, its sphere of "vital interest"; a grey zone where Kremlin's narrative blurs the line between foreign and domestic policy.

As for the European Union, due to different political and economic interests, it has too often allowed its policy towards its post-Soviet European neighbours to be guided by the concern of "do not upset Russia". But experience shows that this caution approach has led to an impasse in the relations between the EU and Russia.

To fully grasp what Kremlin policy means and what is at stake for Europe as a whole, it is important to acknowledge that Western or Russian perceptions and approaches are not enough: we need the eyes and the experience of these neighbours.

09.00 – 09.30 **Welcome**

**PoI Morillas**, Director, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)

**María Pallares**, Programme Coordinator, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Madrid

**Lucas González Ojeda**, Deputy Head, Representation of the European Commission in Spain

09.30 – 10.30 **Hot points: Ukraine and Belarus**

*Chair:* **Carmen Claudín**, Associate Senior Researcher, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)

**Pavlo Klimkin**, Center for National Resilience and Development, Kyiv. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ukraine

**Pavel Slunkin**, Visiting Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations, London/Belarus

**Arkady Moshes**, Program Director for the EU Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia research program, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki

10.30 – 11.30 **South Caucasus: “Unfinished business”**

*Chair:* **James Nixey**, Director, Russia-Eurasia Programme, Chatham House, London  
**Gayane Abrahamyan**, President “For Equal Rights” Educational Center NGO, Yerevan  
**Arzu Geybullayeva**, Regional analyst, correspondent, and blogger, Istanbul/Baku  
**George Tarkhan-Mouravi**, Co-Director, Public Political Institute, Tbilisi

11-30 – 12.00 Coffee break

12.00 – 13.00 **Rethinking the Eastern Partnership: lessons for the EU**

*Chair:* **Christopher Forst**, Director, Regional Office Dialogue Eastern Europe, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
**Stanislav Secrieru**, Senior Analyst, European Institute for Security Studies, EUISS, Paris  
**Michael Siebert**, Managing Director for Russia, Eastern partnership, Central Asia, Regional cooperation and OSCE, European External Action Service (EEAS), Brussels

13.00 – 13.30 **Closing**

**Federico de Torres Muro**, General Director for Foreign and Security Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Government of Spain