

Direction of EU-Russia political relations

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The European Parliament adopted by 494 votes to 103, with 72 abstentions, a recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the direction of EU-Russia political relations.

Parliament distinguishes between the Russian people and President Putin's regime, which is a stagnating authoritarian kleptocracy led by a president-for-life surrounded by a circle of oligarchs. The critical actions proposed in this recommendation are hence directed towards President Putin's regime and its criminal

actions and anti-democratic policies, while stressing the urgent need to reach out to Russian citizens to show them that the European Union is ready to address their concerns.

Members recommended that the EU's policy towards Russia be reviewed with Member States and that a comprehensive EU strategy towards Russia be developed based on the following principles and actions:

Detering the Russian threat - Combating the security threat

The current Russian regime threatens peace and security in Europe by continuing to commit systematic human rights abuses against its people and by its aggressive foreign policy behaviour. According to the recent assessment of the NATO Reflection Group, Russia poses a long-term threat to Europe's security.

Parliament believes that the EU should strengthen its role as a global actor to prevent Russia from pursuing a 'bilateralisation' of relations with the EU and should address Russia's most recent national security strategy, which formally recognises the anti-western vector of Russian foreign policy.

The EU should cooperate more with its partners and invest in projects to strengthen its security and joint capabilities in military operations, information technology and energy, as well as the coordination of Member States' counter-intelligence efforts.

Combating Russian interference in the EU and in the Eastern neighbourhood

Members noted that a growing number of international actors, including Russia, are developing hybrid warfare strategies, particularly against the EU and its Member States, with a view to undermining the European project, polarising democratic societies and driving a wedge between them through disinformation. The EU, in coordination with NATO and its partners, including the Eastern Partnership countries, should ensure that sufficient resources and instruments are deployed to combat Russian hybrid threats and interference.

Furthermore, the EU should recognise the European aspirations of its neighbouring countries and reject Russia's policy of spheres of influence. Members consider that the EU, together with NATO and international partners, should act as a deterrent to Russia in order to maintain peace and stability in Europe and beyond, by strengthening its own defence capabilities and urging the Russian authorities to refrain from interference in the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhood.

The EU should also ensure that the security dimension of the Eastern Partnership countries is also reflected in the EU Strategic Compass and should also consider launching a series of security compacts – frameworks for increased investment and assistance in security, military, intelligence and cyber

cooperation – with select countries in the EU’s neighbourhood, such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, in order to strengthen their resilience.

Engagement and selective dialogue with the Kremlin to prepare for Russia's transition

Parliament believes that the EU should work in two directions: on the one hand, towards a selective conditional dialogue with the Kremlin authorities and regional governments, and, on the other hand, towards strategic engagement with Russian civil society, which is striving for democracy in Russia, as well as independent cooperation with regional and local actors. The EU strategy should not exclude dialogue with the authorities, where this is in the EU's interest and does not undermine the EU's commitments to human rights and democratic objectives.

Responding with sanctions, financial controls and international investigations

The EU should strengthen its cooperation with the US and other like-minded partners and propose a toolkit for the defence of democracy, which should include joint action on sanctions, policies to combat illicit financial flows, rules on the conditionality of economic and financial assistance, international investigations, and an ambitious programme of support for freedom and democracy and for men and women who campaign for human rights and defend democracy.

The EU should establish a centralised framework to combat illicit financial flows and further strengthen its framework to combat money laundering. National governments and international organisations should, in parallel, investigate the hidden assets of key Russian leaders and oligarchs and make these figures public.

Furthermore, the EU should implement a clear strategy on how to end its dependency on gas, oil and other raw materials (notably iron, steel, aluminium and nickel) from Russia as long as President Putin is in power. It should pursue an ambitious and resolute green agenda and make the rapid implementation of the European Green Deal its top geopolitical priority.

Support for a pro-democracy society in Russia

The democratic transformation of Russia is of major interest for the geopolitical security of the EU. Members consider that Russia can become a democracy and that, like all people, Russian citizens aspire to the universal values of freedom and democracy. The EU should therefore present the Russian people with concrete proposals for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Russia should engage in the resolution of ongoing conflicts and the prevention of any future conflicts, starting by returning the occupied and illegally annexed territories in the EaP region according to their internationally recognised borders and by respecting countries’ EU, Euro-Atlantic and democratic choices.

In line with the principle of ‘democracy first’, the EU should strengthen the requirement of conditionality in its relations with Russia by pursuing a dialogue or agreement with Russia on measures aimed at protecting human rights, media freedom and the holding of free elections as a stronger requirement for dialogue.