

EU-Russia Relations: Contentions and Cooperation 2015 – 2022

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze and understand the complexities of the EU-Russia relationship between 2015 and 2022, focusing on areas of disagreement and cooperation in the spheres of economy and security. This research analyses the impact of economic cooperation and security disagreements on the relationship between these two influential actors in global politics. Between 2015 and 2022, the interaction between the European Union (EU) and Russia was characterized by a complex blend of dispute and cooperation, particularly in the realms of commerce and safety. From 2015 to 2022, the relationship between the European Union and Russia went through a challenging phase marked by the imposition of economic sanctions, dependence on energy resources, and heightened security tensions. Despite occasional efforts at collaboration and diplomatic interaction, these controversial issues consistently overshadowed the relationship between the EU and Russia during this time, significantly impacting its dynamics. This study is highly significant for policymakers, scholars, and judges interested in transnational connections and the correlation between the European Union and Russia. Moreover, this study adds to the broader discussion on worldwide political stability and the interconnectedness of economies.

Keywords: Diplomatic Relations, Energy Dependency, Economic Cooperation, Security Issues, Sanctions, Ukraine Conflict

Introduction

The relationship between the European Union and Russia has been characterized by significant intricacy and uncertainty, especially between 2015 and 2022. The EU and Russia had conflicts and collaborations in business and security throughout this period. Since 2014, when Russia invaded Crimea, and more recently, the war begun by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 has significantly deteriorated relations with the European Union. Nevertheless, the EU strives to restore cooperation efforts in its relations with Russia until then. The European Union (EU) oversees the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), which is responsible for monitoring the execution of the Minsk Agreements. The Minsk Agreements were reached in 2015 to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The primary goal of this study is to examine two key factors: Contentions and Cooperation in EU-Russia ties from 2015 to 2022. During this period, various problems and conflicts strained the relationship between the two entities, namely economic disagreement and security contention. The European Union (EU) and Russia have maintained a strategic alliance for several decades, established under the Alliance and Cooperation Agreements 1997, to regulate their relationship. The EU-Russia cooperation encompasses three main areas: energy cooperation, environmental cooperation, and scientific cooperation, within the specified

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time range. An analysis of the EU-Russia ties from 2015 to 2022 will focus on the political, economic, and cultural sectors (Khlopovo, 2007).

From 2015 to 2022, contentious issues significantly influenced EU-Russia interactions despite periodic attempts to engage in political discourse and collaboration. Throughout this period, the European Union (EU) and Russia experienced discord and cooperation in economics and security. Relations dramatically worsened with Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent conflict instigated by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022. The European Union is encountering difficulties in establishing positive and productive relations with Russia (Selezeneve, 2022). The Minsk Agreements, implemented in 2015, were designed to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This study specifically examines the issues of disagreements and collaboration in the relations between the European Union and Russia from 2015 to 2022. This age was characterized by many challenges and conflicts, which put pressure on connections in both economic and security spheres. The European Union (EU) and Russia have maintained a strategic engagement for many years, which has been marked by collaboration and formal agreements, such as the 1997 cooperation agreement for regulation. However, since 2014, tensions have increased because of Russia's takeover of Crimea, backing of separatist factions in eastern Ukraine, actions that destabilize neighboring nations, utilization of intimidation strategies, and violations of human rights within Russia (Kryukova, 2017).

Russia ratified the Minsk Agreements in September 2014 and February 2015 to stop the violence in eastern Ukraine and create a political solution. After Russia launched a comprehensive military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, all remaining political, cultural, and scientific collaboration came to a halt. Despite the implementation of the Minsk II agreement, the conflict persists, and the matter of incorporating Donetsk and Luhansk into Ukraine remains unsolved. Russia has not formally incorporated these territories, does not acknowledge them as autonomous nations, and asserts non-participation in the situation in eastern Ukraine. However, it offers the rebels financial and military assistance and wields substantial control over them. Russia has faced retaliatory measures from the EU in the form of sanctions, to which it has replied with its counter-sanctions. The purpose of these steps is to ensure Russian collaboration in the resolution of the Donbass conflict. The European Council's stance in March 2015 stipulated that lifting sanctions against Russia is contingent upon the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements (Mahilaj, 2023).

Research Methodology

This study examines the diplomatic interactions between the European Union (EU) and Russia from 2015 to 2022, focusing on economic disputes and security concerns. The research utilizes secondary data collected through a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature, including papers, books, journal articles, and other scholarly materials. Additionally, interviews are conducted to supplement the data collection process. The aim is to explore the factors and assumptions crucial for understanding the complexities of the EU-Russia relationship during this period, which is characterized by challenges and opportunities. The methodology involves an exhaustive review of relevant literature from various sources, such as books, research papers, journal articles, and electronic media. Secondary data is gathered from diverse sources, including books, academic papers, journals, television talk shows, and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This approach aims to thoroughly understand the lucrative disputes and security concerns that have defined EU-Russia relations from 2015 to 2022.

Contentions and Cooperation

Economic Cooperation

The relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia have always been challenging. However, in 2014, they reached a new and susceptible phase due to a confrontation between the two parties about Ukraine's association agreement with the EU, as well as Russia's aggressive actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The EU and other Western countries have issued warrants against Russia, and in response, Russia has implemented counter-sanctions. Russia is actively engaging in a hostile and progressively less successful campaign of disseminating information against the European Union. Due to the deadlock in Ukraine and Russia's transnational amalgamation through military action in Syria, there is no foreseeable resolution to the ongoing tensions. Despite the influence of political pressures, the economic relationship between the two parties continues to be strong and financially beneficial. Russia's most significant trading partner is the EU, whereas Russia ranks fourth as a trading partner for the EU. Russia is the primary energy provider for the European Union (Kryukova, 2017).

In 2021, Russia ranked as the fifth largest trade partner of the European Union, accounting for 5.8% of the EU's overall trade in products with the rest of the world.

In 2020, the European Union (EU) was Russia's primary trade partner, representing 37.3% of the nation's overall commerce in products with the rest of the world. Russia imported 36.5% of its goods from the European Union, while 37.9% were sent to the European Union. The EU and Russia had a total product trade of €257.5 billion in 2021. The European Union's imports were valued at €158.5 billion and were primarily fuel and mining products. Specifically, mineral fuels accounted for €98.9 billion (62%), wood for €3.16 billion (2.0%), iron and steel for €7.4 billion (4.7%), and fertilizers for €1.78 billion (1.1%). The overall value of the European Union's exports in 2021 amounted to €99.0 billion. The leading sectors in terms of value were machinery and equipment (€19.5 billion, 19.7%), motor cars (€8.95 billion, 9%), medicines (€8.1 billion, 8.1%), electrical equipment and machinery (€7.57 billion, 7.6%), and plastics (€4.38 billion, 4.3%). In 2020, the total value of services traded between the EU and Russia was €29.4 billion. The EU imported services from Russia worth €8.9 billion, while its services exports to Russia amounted to €20.5 billion. The European Union (EU) held the highest position as the primary investor in Russia throughout 2019. The European Union's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Russia reached a total of €311.4 billion, while Russia's FDI in the EU was predicted to be €136 billion.

Sanctions

Specific actions, including the freezing of assets and the imposition of visa bans on members of the Russian aristocracy, Ukrainian insurgents, and linked organizations, were part of the European Union's sanctions against Russia in 2014. Furthermore, political actions were implemented, such as the official halting of summits between the European Union and Russia, the postponement of the new cooperation agreement between the two organizations, and Russia's withdrawal from the G8. An unprecedented string of actions targeting crucial Russian economic sectors and senior leaders has been precipitated by the rapid and fierce rivalry among eleven packages of EU warrants, earlier known as a "warrants revolution" (Selezeneve, 2022).

Since 2014, the range of warrant services supplied has steadily expanded and improved with each package. Part of this process involves changing the government rules so that goods made in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia cannot be imported to the European Union.

The impacting warrant packages include a wide variety of items from the banking, energy, transportation, consultancy, media, luxury, and other industries. The Russian government issued a

list of "unfriendly" foreign nations in reaction to the European Union and global warrants issued against Russia after it invaded Ukraine in February 2022. All countries that have sanctioned Russia are on this list, including EU members, the UK, the US, and others. The reference is to a 2017 (Maass, 2017). Vibrant business and financial operations involving a Russian affiliation are affected by the much more intricate punitive countersanctions that individuals from these countries are currently experiencing. Russian officials decided on March 31, 2022, to extend their "stop list" to include some high-ranking EU officials, officers, leaders of EU military institutions, and some members of the European Parliament, among others. Public personalities from Congress, the media, and the general public are also included on the Russian blacklist, along with top officials from the governments of several EU member states (Danilov, 2018).

Economic Sanctions

The European Union (EU) has implemented substantial economic sanctions against Russia since 2014, mainly in reaction to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its participation in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The European Union originally retaliated by imposing sanctions that targeted individuals and organizations guilty of undermining Ukraine's territorial integrity. These penalties included freezing their assets and imposing travel bans. As the crisis in Eastern Ukraine intensified, the scope of these sanctions was broadened to encompass more comprehensive economic measures. In addition, diplomatic actions were implemented, including the halting of bilateral discussions with Russia about visa affairs and Russia's admission to the OECD and International Energy Agency.

The European Union has enforced sectoral restrictions that target specific sectors of the Russian economy. Due to financial constraints, EU capital markets were inaccessible to Russian state-owned financial institutions, defense enterprises, and energy companies. The energy sector encountered limitations on the export of specific equipment and technologies. In contrast, the defense sector was subjected to an embargo on importing and exporting weapons and associated materials. Furthermore, there were limitations imposed on the export of dual-use commodities and technologies that had the potential to be used for military purposes. The trade restrictions encompassed a prohibition on importing goods from Crimea and Sevastopol and constraints on trade and investment in particular economic sectors and infrastructure projects inside these territories. These extensive measures were designed to apply economic pressure on Russia to influence its activities in Ukraine and ensure compliance with international law. Over time, the European Union has consistently revised and broadened these sanctions in reaction to advancements in the conflict and Russia's behavior, upholding an unwavering position.

Trade restrictions with Crimea and other sectors like energy, fiscal cooperation with Russia, and the arms trade were subsequently enacted. Russian countersanctions were imposed in August 2014 as a form of retaliation. The EU-Russia visa facilitation suspension is only one of several political reasons that have been considered. The European Union has requested that the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its member states deny Russia preferential treatment in trade (Cadier, 2015).

After Yanukovich was ousted during Euromaidan on February 22 2014, mysterious Russian forces entered Crimea on February 27 and quickly assumed control. On the same day, a referendum was proposed to change Crimea's status and relationship with Ukraine. The vote was about reintegrating into Russia or independence, as clarified on March 6, 2014. Crimea declared independence on March 17, 2014, and Russia seized it on March 21 after a flawed referendum. European Union sanctions began on March 17. These sanctions included travel restrictions and

asset freezing for 21 people who violated Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty in Crimea and Sevastopol. Diplomatic steps included ending an EU-Russia summit on March 20, 2014. Several sanctions followed. Before the crisis escalated in February 2022, the EU had frozen assets and barred travel for 175 people and 44 organizations. Exporting military, dual-use, and oil and gas equipment was prohibited. European banks needed help working with five big state-owned Russian banks and investing or trading with Crimea and Sevastopol.

EU sanctions first seemed successful. Retrospectively, the sanctions were ineffectual. After eight years, Russia invaded entire Ukraine and failed to withdraw from Crimea and the Donbas. Volodymyr Zelenskyy openly supported NATO accession in 2021, and by December, Russia had mobilized over 100,000 troops along the Ukrainian border. By November 2021, the EU knew Russia may invade and prepared sanctions. The EU responded quickly on February 23 2022, to the Russian Federation's recognition of the non-government-controlled portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine as separate entities and their deployment of Russian soldiers. The EU sanctioned 351 Russian Duma members, 27 others, and four entities when the Russian Federation recognized the breakaway republics. Russia invaded on February 24, 2022, causing the EU to impose more sanctions the next day. Additional sanctions restricted Russian oil, aviation, space, defense, and security exports. Russian ambassadors, government officials, and entrepreneurs lost visa facilitation. Immediately after, discussions began over a third set of sanctions, adopted on February 27, 2022, closing EU airspace to Russian aircraft. The ultimate decision to exclude Russian banks from SWIFT was made on March 2 2022. On March 15, 2022, the fourth package increased trade restrictions on luxury goods, iron, and steel and embargoed Russian energy investment (Sanus et al., 2024).

The fifth package, ratified on April 8 2022, was primarily inspired by Russian military attacks on Ukrainian citizens, particularly in Bucha. The third package in 2014 questioned the EU's humanitarian duty, prompting a more robust response. The package banned Russian coal, solid fossil fuels, timber, cement, and fertilizer imports. It also banned Russian ships from EU ports. The package also banned exports of jet fuel, advanced semiconductors, and high-end gadgets. Despite the wishes of some member states, such as Hungary, 7Through the sixth package, the EU restricted Russian oil. Pipeline crude oil imports were excluded for 6–8 months. Germany and Poland did not use this exception, which was meant for Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia. On May 31, 2022, von der Leyen joyfully announced an 89%–90% drop in Russian oil imports. The package also restricted exports and banned Russian broadcasts in the EU. The seventh wave of sanctions included new limits on Russian gold and jewelry. It strengthened, clarified, and expanded prior penalties—the ninth package limited crude and petroleum oil prices on December 3 2022, targeting Russian oil.

The ninth package, implemented on December 16 2022, banned drone engines, dual-use goods and technology exports, mining investments, Russian Regional Development Bank transactions, advertising, market research, and public opinion polling. The 10th package was adopted on February 25, 2023, the first anniversary of the invasion. This package banned the export of critical technologies and industrial commodities, the import of asphalt and synthetic rubber, the provision of gas storage capacity to Russians, and the passage through Russia of EU dual-use items and technology. On June 23, 2023, the 11th and final package was ratified to strengthen EU sanctions against Russia (Consilium Press, 2023). EU sanctions target 1782 people and entities in 14 packages.

Countersanctions

In 2013, the prohibition of multiple crises in EU agrifood products led to the exclusion of 43% of total EU agrifood exports to Russia and 4.2% of total EU agrifood exports to the rest of the world. Although facing antagonism in the form of warrants and counter-sanctions, the European Union (EU) remained Russia's primary trading partner. Until 2021, Russia had the position of being the European Union's fifth-largest commercial partner. Starting in August 2014, Russia initiated a series of countermeasures against the European Union (EU) by placing sanctions on agricultural products, raw resources, and food. Russia justified these actions by alleging that the EU's products violated food security requirements. This has validated Russia's approach to negotiating imports in the agricultural sector. Russia implements a 'stop list' that bars individuals from the European Union and the United States who have disapproved of its policies from entering Russian territory. The lack of official publication of this list prevents any possibility of a legal challenge, unlike the European Union's travel ban. The EU reevaluated Russian relations in 2016 as "a crucial strategic issue" in the context of the EU's global security policy. The Council established five guiding principles in March 2016 to govern EU-Russia relations (Beyli, 2015).

- (1) Implementing the Minsk agreements in the crisis in eastern Ukraine is a critical requirement for any significant change in the European Union's stance towards Russia.
- (2) Enhanced diplomatic ties with the European Union's Eastern allies and other neighboring countries, notably those in Central Asia;
- (3) Enhancing the EU's capacity to respond to various challenges, such as ensuring energy security, addressing complex obstacles, and improving strategic communication.
- (4) Selective and discerning interaction with Russia over matters that are of importance to the European Union;
- (5) The necessity to actively participate in interpersonal relationships and assist Russian civil society.

Russia has been widely seen as an aggressor towards Ukraine since their massive invasion in February 2022. Russian policy has consequently changed within the European Union.

Financial Impact of the Sanctions Enforced Due to the Ukraine War

In 2014, Russia had the position of being the European Union's third most significant commercial partner. However, commerce between the two has subsequently experienced a significant decline. Most of this decline is attributed to Russia's ongoing economic downturn, but a portion of it is directly associated with warrants. The EU's agricultural and food exports have been severely affected by Russia's decision to ban over half of them. This has had a significant negative impact on European growers.

Additionally, the EU's financial sector faces a higher risk of default on Russian debt. The countries most severely impacted are those with strong economic ties with Russia, such as Finland and the Baltic countries. However, the EU's economic commitment has demonstrated adaptability, and the consequences have been minimal. In reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine, the EU and other Western countries have implemented a series of measures to address the situation. These measures include suspending bilateral cooperation, strengthening the EU's ability to identify individuals associated with the Russian government, and imposing sanctions on the Russian defense, oil, and financial sectors. Russia finds profitable warrants highly burdensome, causing a loss of up to 2% of GDP each time. Specifically, limited access to Western capital requests challenges Russian enterprises seeking to finance investments. However, the decline in oil price, which is Russia's

primary import, is a more influential component in the current slowdown of the Russian economy than warranted (Mahilaj, 2023).

EU Dependence on Russian Energy Imports

Energy security is a vulnerable issue, as Russia is the EU's primary supplier of oil and gas. Indeed, in many European Union countries, particularly the Baltic republics, almost one-third of the energy consumption is derived from Russian gas. A significant portion of this gas is transported through pipelines that traverse Ukraine, a nation with even more complicated relations with Moscow than the European Union. This situation increases the likelihood that Europe's gas supplies could be used as leverage in geopolitical conflicts. The reference is from Aoki M in 2007 (Aoki, 2007).

The perils of over-dependence on Russian energy were brought to the forefront in 2009 when gas deliveries to numerous EU nations were temporarily halted due to protracted tensions between Moscow and Kyiv. Despite increasing its oil and gas imports from Russia, the EU has implemented significant measures to reduce the associated risks. This encompasses the creation of innovative energy infrastructure, such as interconnected pipelines that enable gas exchange between EU Member States, ports for importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) from countries like the United States and Qatar, and storage facilities for gas reserves.

The Nord Stream 2 project, which seeks to provide a direct link between Germany and Russia while avoiding Ukraine, has highlighted Russia's significant control as the primary energy provider to Europe. The pipeline has sparked a conflict between its proponents, such as Germany and Austria, who are anticipated to benefit most from it, and opponents, such as Poland and the Baltic states. Moreover, it has triggered complications with the United States, which enforced penalties in December 2020 on corporations engaged in its construction. The European Commission vehemently objected to this judgement. Upon completion of Nord Stream 2, Russia's pipeline capacity to Europe will be augmented by more than 25%, potentially bolstering its already substantial dominance over European gas markets. Another concerning consequence is the likelihood of reduced transportation of Russian gas through Ukraine, which would negatively affect Kyiv's struggling economy. In 2017, Kyiv received US\$3 billion in payments for gas transmission (Belyii, 2015).

Regardless of the presence of Nord Stream 2, the European Union's reliance on Russian gas is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. This is due to increasing demand for gas within the EU, as it is a cost-effective and relatively environmentally friendly fuel. Additionally, domestic gas production within the EU, such as in the Netherlands, is declining rapidly. While liquefied natural gas (LNG) is an alternative, it is expensive. Furthermore, other potential gas suppliers in Norway.

Figure 1: Economic / trade relations EU and Russia

Source: The source of the information is the website: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/russia_en

Security Contentions

The European Union formally embraced its strategic compass for security and defense in March 2022, recognizing Russia's persistent and substantial threat to European security. This signifies a substantial shift in the EU-Russia relationship since 2016. The NATO strategic concept, adopted in June 2022, solidified this perspective by stating that the Russian Federation is the primary and most imminent peril to the security of Allies and peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. Since 2022, EU initiatives targeting Russia have been developed according to the subsequent guiding principles.

1. It is imperative to diplomatically isolate Russia on the global platform and carefully assess its measures to aid in its involvement in armed conflict.
2. The international community must assure accountability by holding Russia, individual wrongdoers, and their accomplices responsible for violations of international law and acts of warfare carried out in Ukraine.
3. The European Union must assist its neighboring countries, including through its expansive programmes, and offer support to allies around the world in order to tackle the repercussions of Russia's aggressive assault against Ukraine.
4. It is important to encourage strong collaboration with NATO and other allies worldwide to protect the transnational order based on established rules.
5. The European Union needs to improve its ability to respond, especially in energy security and critical infrastructure. It should also address Russia's cyber threats, manipulation of information, and obstruction.

6. It is crucial to assist civil society, human rights advocates, and independent media beyond Russia while addressing security and public order issues within the EU.

The European Union has vehemently denounced Russia's illicit and unwarranted military aggression towards Ukraine, which encompasses its assaults on both civilians and infrastructure. The European Union has demanded that all Russian military forces be withdrawn from Ukraine without delay and under any conditions by the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine. There is evidence to support the claim that this act of aggression is a blatant violation of the UN charter and fundamental principles of international law. The Russian Federation bears full responsibility for it (Russell, 2018)

Before the start of the active struggle, parliament had previously denounced the Russian government's domestic oppression and the deteriorating human rights situation on many occasions. In response to Russia's commencement of an aggressive war against Ukraine, Parliament reiterated its strong condemnation, explicitly focusing on the severe restrictions placed on freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly and association, and the frequent oppression of civil society organizations, human rights activists, independent media, legal professionals, and political dissenters (Pichon, 2019).

EU-Russia Diplomatic Relations

As of 2013, the European Union had effectively finalized association agreements with Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia. These agreements involved comprehensive political and economic collaboration. Armenia and Ukraine decided not to agree to their deals due to Moscow's coercion. The chairman, Viktor Yanukovich, sought refuge in Russia due to the mounting opposition in Ukraine. Petro Poroshenko, a pro-Western politician, signed the association agreement in June 2014 after assuming office as the successor to the previous leader (Averre, 2018).

In March 2014, Russia forcibly took control of Crimea and assisted separatist movements in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Throughout the following six occurrences, armed fighting in these two locations led to the demise of more than 13,000 persons and compelled millions of others to evacuate their residences. The Russo-Georgian war in 2008 led to a temporary amelioration in ties. Nevertheless, there will not be a rapid return to regular economic activities in this particular instance.

The EU strongly condemned Russia's violations of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, which contradict the principles that Russia had previously recognized through its endorsement of agreements such as the United Nations (UN) Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Ukraine. Consequently, the European Union and its allies, such as the United States, enforced a series of actions, to which Russia retaliated with sanctions; these actions have been in place ever since (Casier, 2018).

Since 2014, several significant impediments have been to improving EU-Russia relations in Ukraine. These examples encompass Russia's military involvement in Syria, the attempted poisoning in 2018 of former Russian asset Sergey Skripal by Kremlin agents, and Russia's use of aggressive tactics such as intimidation and hacking attempts to disrupt and destabilize EU nations. The source of this information is David (David, 2013).

Sanctions and Counter Sanctions

Considering the importance of obtaining Russian cooperation in resolving the Donbass conflict, the initial principle affirms the European Council's stance from March 2015 that economic

sanctions against Russia can only be lifted after the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. The EU introduced these warrants in 2014.

- Individual warrants have been issued for visa bans and asset freezes on approximately 150 individuals and 40 organizations. The EU has imposed a comprehensive restriction on trade and investment with Crimea.
- Lucrative warrants aimed explicitly against Russia's fiscal, defense, and energy industries.
- The EU significantly reduced its political collaboration with Russia, similar to how it would with profitable warrants. The EU has indefinitely halted EU-Russia summits and discussions on a new cooperation and partnership agreement. Most discussions on topics such as human rights and energy have reached an impasse, while more collaboration is needed on specific non-supervisory matters. Russia has retaliated by imposing counter-sanctions, prohibiting around half of its agricultural and food imports from the EU, such as fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy products. According to a study conducted in 2018, the EU lucrative warrants, extended twice a year in January and July, have had a significant negative impact on Russia. By late 2018, Russia's frugality was 6% lower than it would have been if not for the restrictive measures imposed by the EU and US Forsberg, 2016 (Forsberg, 2016).

Cyber Attacks

2015, US intelligence services identified Russia as the primary global cyber threat source. In 2007, Russian cyber-attacks inflicted substantial harm on Estonian banks and government agencies, rendering them unable to function. The CIA has identified Russian military intelligence as the source of the dissemination of the very damaging NotPetya malware. This malware caused extensive computer failures on a global scale in 2017. There are suspicions that Russian operatives were involved in cyber activities during Emmanuel Macron's 2017 presidential campaign, which targeted the German parliament and political parties. Since 2018, the European Union has been given the power to impose sanctions on individuals and businesses responsible for malicious cyber activities. However, it has yet to utilize this capability.

Moscow strategically cultivates alliances with populist, primarily far-right, pro-Russia factions within the European Union to bolster its political sway and incite contentious debates. In anticipation of the 2017 French presidential election, Russian President Putin invited Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French political party Rassemblement National, for a personal meeting. One year later, he participated in a dance with Karin Kneissl, who was serving as the foreign minister and was a member of the Austrian Freedom Party, following her wedding. EU member states have adopted several tactics to counteract Russian and other foreign disinformation. Several nations have integrated media literacy instruction into their educational programs. At the same time, regulatory authorities have implemented stringent actions against pro-Kremlin networks such as RT due to their failure to adhere to media standards.

The European Union formed an East StratCom Task Force at the European level in 2015. The task force regularly publishes a Disinformation Review every week to identify and debunk misleading information that originates from pro-Kremlin sites. The Task Force also aids in strengthening the capacity of Eastern Partnership members to resist and counter Russian disinformation. This is accomplished by engaging in initiatives such as offering training to journalists and developing Russian-language materials that elucidate EU policies for regional audiences (Derek, 2018). The European Union (EU) implemented a comprehensive strategy in 2018 to combat the spread of false information, including adopting an Action Plan and a Code of Practice. Several social media

companies have signed the latter, pledging to eliminate bogus profiles and provide transparency for users regarding the sponsors of online political advertisements.

Conclusion

Since the post-Cold War reset in the 1990s, the relations between the European Union and Russia have become progressively less strained. Initially perceived as a pro-Western leftist, Vladimir Putin has exhibited a diminishing inclination towards authoritarianism since taking office in 2000. His efforts to establish Russian dominance over post-Soviet neighboring countries have jeopardized their sovereignty. Russia's 2008 conflict with Georgia resulted in a brief reduction in relations with the European Union (EU). However, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 resulted in a continued and unending separation. In response to the aggressive actions of Russia in Ukraine, the European Union implemented stringent sanctions. From 2015 to 2022, the European Union's relationship with Russia fluctuated between pursuing a mutually acceptable geopolitical equilibrium and escalating conflicts. Although written before the 2022 war, these writings are still highly relevant as they analyze the ongoing transformation of the EU's role in its Eastern neighborhood. To effectively build a strategic approach towards their largest neighboring country, Europeans must strengthen their comprehension of the evolving circumstances in Russia.

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