

# State of EU-Russia relations

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Gabrielius LANDSBERGIS (EPP, LT) on the state of EU-Russia relations.

Members recalled that Russia has illegally annexed Crimea, an action which was strongly condemned by the EU and which will not be recognised. They stated that Russia is directly or indirectly, involved in a number of 'frozen conflicts' in its neighbourhood – in Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno Karabakh – that constitute serious impediments to the development and stability of the neighbouring countries concerned and to their rapprochement with the EU.

Members also stated that Russia - against the spirit of good neighbourly relations and in breach of international law, rules and standards - has, taken deliberate actions aimed at destabilising its neighbours through illegal trade embargos or the conclusion of integration treaties with separatist and breakaway regions.

Recalling its acts in Crimea and the east of Ukraine, Members stressed that the **EU cannot envisage a return to 'business as usual'** and has no choice but to conduct a critical re-assessment of its relations with Russia, which includes the drafting, as promptly as possible, of a **softpower contingency plan to counter the aggressive and divisive policies conducted by Russia**, and a **comprehensive plan on its future relations** with that country and with its Eastern European partners. They underlined that the resolution of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine **can only be political in nature**.

Members are alarmed by the growing atmosphere of hatred directed against opposition activists, human rights defenders, minorities and neighbouring nations, and the deterioration in the situation of human rights and condemned the intimidation of critical voices through violence, trials, imprisonments and other measures used by the state.

**Bilateral relations in danger:** Members underlined that EU-Russia relations must henceforth be based on respect for international law and a dialogue, whereby the EU would be ready to re-engage and relaunch cooperation with the authorities in Moscow in a number of specific fields of common interest. A resumption of cooperation would be envisaged **on the condition that Russia respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine**, including Crimea, fully implements the Minsk Agreements (which include full control of the border by the Ukrainian authorities, the unconditional withdrawal of Russian troops and weapons, and an immediate halt to the provision of assistance to rebel groups), and stops destabilising military and security activities at the EU Member States' borders.

According to Members, **the EU must clearly define both its expectations of Russia**, especially as regards respecting international law and contractual commitments and acting as a predictable partner, and the measures it will take after 31 December 2015, should Russia fail to honour its commitments.

**Members commended the solidarity and unity demonstrated by the Member States in the context of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and underlined** that the deepening of EU integration and coherence between its internal and external policies is the key to a more coherent, effective and successful EU external and security policy, including vis-à-vis Russia. They called on the Member States to carry on with, and intensify their efforts towards, the effective elimination of decision-making bottlenecks and, also with candidate countries, the consolidation of common policies, in particular in the areas of trade, financial services and transactions, migration, energy, external borders management, information and cyber security.

**Energy policy:** Members reiterated their conviction that energy policy is a significant element of EU external policy. They support, therefore, the swift creation of a robust European Energy Union, specifically the interconnection of national energy networks in order to **reduce considerably the dependence of individual Member States on external energy suppliers, particularly Russia.**

**Restrictions of individual freedoms:** Members are deeply concerned by the ever-growing restrictions on media and internet freedom, the tightening of online media control, the use of coercion to curb impartial reporting and the erosion of journalistic standards in Russia. They are also deeply concerned at the ever more intensive contacts and cooperation, tolerated by the Russian leadership, between European populist, fascist and extreme right-wing parties on the one hand and nationalist groups in Russia on the other. They urged the EU to provide support to projects aimed at promoting and developing high journalistic standards, freedom of the media, and unbiased and trustworthy information in Russia, and at deconstructing propaganda within the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. **The Commission is called upon to make available adequate funding for initiatives developing Russian-language media alternatives to Russian state-controlled media.**

Members called on Russia to acknowledge the scope and gravity of the **problem of violence and harassment against LGBTI people in Russia**, and to commit to taking steps to end these abuses and to repeal the provisions of Law No. 135-FZ of June 29, 2013 (the 'gay propaganda' law) banning distribution of information about LGBTI relationships. They strongly condemned the government's continued crackdown on dissent by targeting independent NGOs through the so-called "foreign agents law" and the persistent and multiform repression of activists, political opponents and critics of the regime. It drew particular attention to the assassinations of Anna Politkovskaya, Natalya Estemirova, Boris Nemtsov, Sergey Magnitsky, Alexander Litvinenko and others. They reiterated their call on the Council to deliver on its commitment to defend these principles, and to adopt restrictive measures for the officials involved in the well-documented Magnitsky case.

**Measures are also called for the** continued political and financial support for independent civil society activists, human rights defenders, bloggers, independent media, outspoken academics and public figures and NGOs. They encouraged the EU to reach out to Russian officials and civil society organisations.

Lastly, Members called on the Commission to propose **legislation forbidding financing of political parties in the EU by political or economic stakeholders outside the EU.**