

State of EU-Russia political relations

2018/2158(INI) - 12/03/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 402 votes to 163, with 89 abstentions, a resolution on the state of EU-Russia political relations.

Parliament recalled that the EU remains open to a stronger relationship and to dialogue leading thereto, and wishes to return to cooperative relations with Russia, once the Russian authorities have met their international and legal obligations and have proven Russia's genuine commitment to restore broken trust.

Shared challenges and interests

While condemning the illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea, as well as Russia's continued violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia and Moldova, Members stressed that the EU cannot envisage a gradual return to 'business as usual' until Russia fully implements the Minsk Agreement and restores the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

As Russia can no longer be considered a 'strategic partner' in the current circumstances, Members believe that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement should be reconsidered. They stated that any framework for the EU-Russia relationship should be based on the full respect of international law, the Helsinki OSCE principles, democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law, and allow for dialogue on managing global challenges, the strengthening of global governance and ensuring enforcement of international rules.

Members condemned Russia's involvement in the Skripal case and recalled the interference of Russian state actors in the referendum campaign on Brexit, which is currently under investigation by the British authorities. The Union's response to the Russian propaganda campaign and the massive and direct attacks of disinformation has been insufficient and should be strengthened, in particular before the next European elections in May 2019. The funding and human resources of the European East StratCom task force should therefore be significantly increased.

Members are also concerned about the links between the Russian government and the extreme right-wing and nationalist populist parties and governments of the Union and Russia's support for authoritarian regimes and countries such as North Korea, Iran, Venezuela, Syria, Cuba, Nicaragua and others, as well as how it continues to block any international action through the exercise of its right of veto in the UN Security Council.

Human rights and sanctions

Members deplored the significant deterioration in the human rights situation and the widespread and undue restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in Russia and are concerned that Russia is showing its readiness to use military force against other nations through concrete actions, including advanced nuclear weapons. They condemned the government's continued repression of dissent and media freedom as well as statements inciting violence against LGBTI people. They also condemned Russia's money laundering activities, illegal financial activities and other means of economic warfare.

Parliament stressed that a meaningful dialogue required firmer unity among Member States and clearer communication of the red lines on the EU side. It therefore stated that the Union should stand ready to adopt new sanctions, including targeted personal sanctions and restricted access to finance and technology, if Russia's violations of international law continue. In this context, Members called on

Member States to end their ‘golden visas and passports’ programmes, which benefit Russian oligarchs who often support the Kremlin and may undermine the effectiveness of international sanctions.

Parliament urged the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to prepare without delay a legislative proposal for an EU-wide Magnitsky law, which would allow visa bans and targeted sanctions, such as asset freezing, to be imposed on officials or persons acting in the performance of their official duties and who are responsible for acts of corruption or serious human rights violations.

Areas of common interest

Members reiterated their support for the five principles guiding the EU’s policy towards Russia and called for further definition of the selective engagement principle. They recommended that the focus be placed on issues relating to the Middle East and North Africa and the Northern and Arctic region, terrorism, violent extremism, non-proliferation, arms control, strategic stability in the cyberspace, organised crime, migration and climate change, including joint efforts to safeguard the UN Security Council endorsed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, and bringing an end to the war in Syria.

They also recommended that the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project, which increases Europe's dependence on Russian gas supplies, should be stopped.

Recommendations

Parliament argued in favour of:

- continued political and financial support for people-to-people contacts in general, and in particular for civil society activists, human rights defenders, bloggers, independent media, investigative journalists, outspoken academics and public figures and NGOs;
- increased people-to-people contacts focusing on young people, enhanced dialogue and cooperation between experts, researchers, civil society and local authorities in the EU and Russia, as well as increased exchanges of students, vocational trainees and young people, in particular within the framework of Erasmus+;
- the unconditional release of all human rights defenders and other persons detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association;
- intensifying EU efforts to increase their resilience, in particular in the fields of information technology and the media, including mechanisms to detect and combat interference in elections; Members called for the development of a binding legal framework, both at EU and international level, to deal with hybrid warfare and to enable the EU to react firmly to campaigns that threaten democracy or the rule of law;
- the establishment of an EU-wide mechanism allowing the screening of political parties’ funding, and for subsequent measures to be taken to avoid some parties and movements being used to destabilise the European project from within.