



SEMINAR

In Search of the European interest: EU policies on Russia from 1991 to the Present

Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

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Russia and the European Union had a rather bumpy relationship over the past few years. Although the relations between the EU and Russia are described as “strategic” by both sides, more areas of disagreement with Russia are enumerated rather than promising avenues for the development of EU - Russia cooperation identified. The euphoria and optimism of the early 1990s has been overshadowed by a renewed rivalry between Russia and “the West” and a lack of mutual understanding in a number of areas. The acrimony around the opening of the negotiations on successor to the EU - Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is perhaps the most vivid illustration of the complex nature of the current relationship.

Is this an inevitable result of the regained economic strength and self-confidence of Russia, or is it partly due to shortcomings of EU policies vis-à-vis Russia?

In order to explore the impact of EU policy towards Russia since 1991, the Directorate General for External Relations of the European Commission together with the incoming French EU Presidency is organising a seminar “*In Search of the European interest: EU policies on Russia from 1991 to the Present*”. This seminar, which will take place on 16 July 2008 in Brussels, will include leading experts and policy makers from the EU institutions and Member States, several of whom have been involved in the formulation and implementation of EU policies or are instrumental to their future development. By elaborating a clear analysis of the past we hope to improve our ability to develop more effective EU policies and better define the European interest for the future.

The seminar will be divided into three plenary sessions, as follows:

- **Session I** will look at the *political and security* dimension of EU policies towards Russia in 1991-2007. The 1990s were full of dramatic events in Russia, which shaped the country and, by the close of the decade, led to the rise to power of a new generation of Russian leaders, many of them related to state security structures. More recently, the enlargement of the European Union brought us yet closer geographically but added further complexity to the EU - Russia relations. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, a number of questions are raised about the effectiveness of the EU policies towards Russia. The supposed dichotomy of a “value-based” versus “interest-based” approach has emerged as one of the central issues.

- **Session II** will focus on *economic and energy cooperation* with Russia. The soaring prices of hydrocarbons and other strategic natural resources over the past few years have propelled the Russian economy from near insolvency in 1998 to becoming the third largest foreign currency reserve holder in the world. Foreign investment is pouring in and many European firms and investors are making healthy profits in the Russian market. Many policy makers are worried that Russia is using its economic strengths and the EU's energy dependency in particular to promote a political agenda. Others are more concerned about the reliability of Russian supplies and the lack of investment into the energy infrastructure. In addition to possible divergences in political and economic aspects of EU policy there are important differences among the EU Member States. What policies are needed to ensure an optimisation for all concerned of the potential of the EU – Russia relationship?

- **Session III** will be dedicated to the discussion on the *future of EU-Russia relations*. In addition to its central role as a trading partner and supplier of energy, Russia has become an important partner for the EU in addressing global challenges as well as regional security issues. In the past, EU member-states have sometimes failed to agree on a common approach vis-à-vis Russia and the concept of “solidarity” has had different meanings in different EU capitals. How can trust be strengthened among the Member States and how the EU could achieve a clearer system of mutual accountability in its relations with Russia?

*The language of the seminar will be English and French.
Participation is by invitation only. The Chatham House Rule will apply.*