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From Accommodation to Confrontation:
European Union's Approach to Russian
Aggression from 1994 to 2024 –
Developmentalism Perspective

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Abstract

“In Russian society there lurks a peculiar complex, an anxiety as to whether it will be taken seriously in the West. This, the biggest country in the world, appears to itself to be small, and that is why it glances at neighboring states as though it doesn’t know exactly where Russia begins and where it ends.”- Vaclav Havel, 2008

If, as Vaclav Havel observed in 2008, Russia’s status anxiety and blurred sense of borders fuel its force projection, why did the European Union keep speaking the language of partnership, reform, and shared progress in the face of repeated force projections—and what finally broke that inertia?

This study proposes that the answer lies in the EU's adoption of what can be termed **developmentalist worldview** — a vision in which Russia was seen as a state in transition, capable of transformation and integration into a shared European future. In this sense, the following paper traces how the European Union’s institutional discourse evolved in response to Russian aggression between 1994 and 2024, and how that evolution reflected, reinforced, or disrupted a developmentalist worldview.

To this end, it introduces the Developmentalism-Aggression Response Index (DARI), a novel interpretive and qualitative framework that assesses the EU's discursive responses to Russian aggression across five key episodes between 1994 and 2024 (Chechnya I; Chechnya II; Georgia 2008; Crimea/Donbas 2014; 2022–2024) and in-between “peace periods”. In particular, the DARI breaks this transformation into five analytically distinct dimensions and 11 sub-indicators. Each dimension captures a different layer of the EU’s discourse: how it frames aggression, what goals it pursues, the tone it adopts, the instruments it deploys, and the worldview that underpins its decisions. As a result, the DARI enables a multilayered, historically grounded, and theory-informed analysis of change over time.

Read through DARI, the five dimensions do not tell five stories. They resolve into one. Framing hardened faster than objectives because legal labels were the least costly way to acknowledge reality. Tone swung because it had to carry the burden of unity while instruments lagged. Objectives clung to conditional engagement well into the sanctions period because conditionality outsourced the hardest admission: that the horizon of renewed partnership had collapsed. What finally moved all four together was collapse of developmentalism. Developmentalism collapsed under a coevolutionary dynamic: EU signals of openness elicited countermoves that normalised accommodation and turned engagement into a tool. The full-scale invasion in 2022 exposed the limits of this logic and forced a securitised response.

The forthcoming analysis makes three main contributions: First, it explains the variation over time of the attitudes with which the European Union has approached Russia from accommodation to confrontation. Second, a reinterpretation through developmentalism that reveals both the strengths and blind spots of an approach grounded in liberal teleologies. Third, a methodological innovation—DARI—that connects words to tools and makes change over time comparable. Ultimately, this is research about the slow erosion of perceptions. It is about how

discourse constructs worldviews, and how the EU, for too long, built one around a partner that was never coming or was never there in the first place.

Streszczenie

*„W społeczeństwie rosyjskim tkwi szczególny kompleks, niepokój o to, czy Zachód potraktuje je poważnie. Ten największy kraj świata wydaje się samemu sobie mały i dlatego spogląda na sąsiednie państwa, jakby nie wiedział dokładnie, gdzie zaczyna się Rosja, a gdzie się kończy” –
Vaclav Havel, 2008 r.*

Jeśli, jak zauważył Vaclav Havel w 2008 roku, niepokój Rosji związany z jej statusem i niejasne poczucie granic napędzają jej agresję, dlaczego Unia Europejska nadal posługiwała się językiem partnerstwa, reform i wspólnego postępu w obliczu powtarzających się aktów agresji – i co ostatecznie przełamało tę inercję?

W niniejszym opracowaniu sugeruje się, że odpowiedź leży w przyjęciu przez UE czegoś, co można nazwać rozwojową wizją świata – wizją, w której Rosja była postrzegana jako państwo w okresie transformacji, zdolne do przemian i integracji ze wspólną europejską przyszłością. W tym sensie niniejszy artykuł śledzi, jak dyskurs instytucjonalny Unii Europejskiej ewoluował w odpowiedzi na agresję Rosji w latach 1994–2024 oraz w jaki sposób ewolucja ta odzwierciedlała, wzmacniała lub zakłócała rozwojową wizję świata.

W tym celu wprowadza indeks reakcji na agresję rozwojową (DARI), nowatorską interpretacyjną i jakościową strukturę, która ocenia dyskursywne reakcje UE na agresję Rosji w pięciu kluczowych epizodach w latach 1994–2024 (Czeczenia I; Czeczenia II; Gruzja 2008; Krym/Donbas 2014; 2022–2024) oraz w międzyczasie „okresów pokoju”. W szczególności DARI dzieli tę transformację na pięć odrębnych wymiarów analitycznych i 11 wskaźników cząstkowych. Każdy wymiar odzwierciedla inną warstwę dyskursu UE: sposób, w jaki określa ona agresję, cele, które realizuje, ton, jaki przyjmuje, instrumenty, które stosuje, oraz światopogląd, który leży u podstaw jej decyzji. W rezultacie DARI umożliwia wielowarstwową, opartą na historii i teorii analizę zmian zachodzących w czasie.

Przeczytaj DARI, pięć wymiarów nie opowiada pięciu historii. Łączą się one w jedną. Ramy ukształtowały się szybciej niż cele, ponieważ etykiety prawne były najtańszym sposobem uznania rzeczywistości. Ton uległ zmianie, ponieważ musiał nieść ciężar jedności, podczas gdy instrumenty pozostawały w tyle. Cele trzymały się warunkowego zaangażowania aż do okresu sankcji, ponieważ warunkowość pozwalała uniknąć najtrudniejszego przyznania się: że perspektywa odnowionego partnerstwa upadła. To, co ostatecznie połączyło wszystkie cztery elementy, to upadek developmentalizmu. Rozwój upadł pod wpływem dynamiki koewolucyjnej: sygnały otwartości ze strony UE wywołały kontrposunięcia, które znormalizowały dostosowanie i przekształciły zaangażowanie w narzędzie. Pełna inwazja w 2022 r. ujawniła ograniczenia tej logiki i wymusiła reakcję w zakresie bezpieczeństwa.

Przedstawiona analiza ma trzy główne zalety: po pierwsze, wyjaśnia zmiany w czasie podejścia Unii Europejskiej do Rosji, od akceptacji do konfrontacji. Po drugie, zawiera reinterpretację opartą na developmentalizmie, która ujawnia zarówno mocne strony, jak i słabe punkty podejścia

opartego na liberalnej teleologii. Po trzecie, wprowadza innowację metodologiczną – DARI – która łączy słowa z narzędziami i umożliwia porównanie zmian w czasie. Ostatecznie jest to badanie dotyczące powolnej erozji postrzegania. Dotyczy ono tego, w jaki sposób dyskurs kształtuje światopogląd oraz tego, jak UE przez zbyt długi czas budowała światopogląd wokół partnera, który nigdy nie nadszedł lub nigdy nie istniał.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|--------------|---|
| ASAP | Act in Support of Ammunition Production |
| ASEM | Asia-Europe Meeting |
| CFSP | Common Foreign and Security Policy |
| CSDP | Common Security and Defence Policy |
| DARI | Developmentalism-Aggression Response Index |
| DPRK | Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) |
| EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| EDIS | EU Defence Industrial Strategy |
| EEAS | European External Action Service |
| EIB | European Investment Bank |
| EP | European Parliament |
| EPF | European Peace Facility |
| EU | The European Union |
| EUAM | European Union Advisory Mission |
| EUCO | The European Council |
| EUMAM | The EU Military Assistance Mission |
| EUMM | European Union Monitoring Mission |
| HR/VP | High Representative/Vice President |
| ICC | International Criminal Court |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| JHA | Justice and Home Affairs |
| JPCOA | Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action |
| MH17 | Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 |
| ODIHR | Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights |
| OPCW | Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons |
| OSCE | Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| PCA | Partnership and Cooperation Agreement |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| PfM | Partnership for Modernisation |
| SMM | Special Monitoring Mission |
| TACIS | Technical Assistance for Commonwealth of Independent States |
| UAF | Ukraine Assistance Fund |
| UNSC | The United Nations Security Council |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WMD | Weapons of Mass Destruction |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Abstract</i> | 1 |
| <i>Streszczenie</i> | 2 |
| <i>List of abbreviations</i> | 4 |
| <i>Introduction</i> | 7 |
| <i>Chapter 1: Literature Review</i> | 8 |
| <i>Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework</i> | 13 |
| <i>Chapter 3: Methodology</i> | 16 |
| 3.1 Research Design | 16 |
| 3.2 Data Sources..... | 17 |
| 3.2.1 Case selection rationale & timeline..... | 17 |
| 3.3 Operationalising the DARI & scoring grid..... | 18 |
| 3.4 Analytical Approach | 22 |
| 3.5 Limitations | 23 |
| <i>Chapter 4: Empirical Case Studies</i> | 24 |
| 4.1. DARI Profile: First Chechen War (1994–1996)..... | 24 |
| 4.2. DARI Profile: Interwar Period (1997-1999)..... | 27 |
| 4.3. DARI Profile: Second Chechen War (1999–2004) | 30 |
| 4.4. DARI Profile: In-between war period (2005-2007)..... | 34 |
| 4.5. DARI Profile: Russo-Georgian War 2008..... | 38 |
| 4.6. DARI Profile: Interwar period (2009-2013)..... | 42 |
| 4.7. DARI Profile: Russo-Ukrainian War 2014 | 46 |
| 4.8. DARI Profile: Interwar Period (2015-2021)..... | 49 |
| 4.9. DARI Profile: Russia’s Full-Scale Invasion (2022–2024)..... | 53 |
| <i>Chapter 5: Comparative Discussion</i> | 56 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 61 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 63 |

Introduction

The initial shock caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 took many foreign-policy analysts and political figures by surprise, prompting a reevaluation of the West's longstanding approach towards Russia. The prevailing Western discourses started to underline past mistakes regarding relations with Russia. A notable manifestation of this introspection was the European Parliament's 2023 statement, reflecting on the 15 years since Russia's conflict with Georgia in August 2008. The statement emphasised that the EU “[...] sees how the international community's fainthearted response in 2008 has emboldened the Kremlin to further violate international law with a view to preventing other countries from choosing freely their own destiny”¹. However, Russian aggression has not commenced in 2008, instead, “the classical Russian imperialism mixed with a specifically post-Soviet revanchism”² should be traced back to the collapse of the USSR, a time when Western narratives were drastically different.

It is notable that initially, the West, particularly the European Union, was hesitant to fully recognise the disintegration of the Soviet Union into fifteen independent republics. It eventually did so following Boris Yeltsin's “blessing of the breakup”³. Consequently, the EU's stance on the power dynamics between the ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ in a newly independent yet unstable Russian Federation was shaped by and dependent upon Moscow's acceptance of the process. “From the western perspective the former Soviet bloc was simply re-conceptualized as a post-socialist eastern ‘other’”⁴. For a time, the post-Soviet space was largely framed as a zone of instability and transition, not as fully independent geopolitical actors in their own right. Over time, however, the western discourse slowly evolved. This transformation led to the prominent narratives that focused on ‘strengthening [the EU’s] defence by countering the threats posed by Russia to European security’⁵.

So, the question is, what long-forgotten choices lit the fuse we are watching burn today?

The central puzzle animating this study is the striking persistence of a deeply optimistic, often accommodationist EU narratives in the face of repeated Russian acts of aggression. From the brutal suppression of Chechnya from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, the war with Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU continued to speak the language of partnership, reform, and shared progress. Why did this narrative persist? Why did the shift from accommodation to confrontation take so long, and what finally broke that inertia?

This study proposes that the answer lies, at least in part, in the EU's adoption of what can be termed a developmentalist worldview — a vision in which Russia was seen not as a permanent

¹ Marina KALJURAND, “Joint Statement on the 15th Anniversary of the Russian Aggression against Georgia of August 2008: Communiqués: Documents: DSCA: Delegations: European Parliament,” Communiqués | Documents | DSCA | Delegations | European Parliament, 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/product/product-details/20230807DPU37082>.

² Alexander Etkind. *Russia Against Modernity*. (United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2023).

³ Forsberg, Tuomas, and Graeme P. Herd. “The EU, Human Rights, and the Russo-Chechen Conflict.” *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 3 (2005): 455–78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20202560>.

⁴ David J. Smith, “Framing the National Question in Central and Eastern Europe: A Quadratic Nexus?,” *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 2, no. 1 (2002): 3–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14718800208405119>.

⁵ “Annual Report on Implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, 2022: Think Tank: European Parliament,” Think Tank | European Parliament, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA\(2023\)739295](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2023)739295).

adversary, but as a state in transition, capable of transformation and integration into a shared European future. This developmentalist lens, grounded in liberal teleologies of progress, democracy, and marketisation, shaped not only EU policy frameworks but the discursive architecture of its institutional responses. It informed the idea that engagement would foster convergence, that time was on the side of reform, and that partnership would be both a means and an end.

Yet this logic came under immense pressure with each instance of Russian force projection. Chechnya exposed the gap between human rights rhetoric and pragmatism. Georgia raised doubts about Russia's respect for borders. Crimea and Donbas revealed the limits of conditionality. And full-scale invasion of Ukraine, finally, forced a reckoning with the possibility that Russia's trajectory was not merely delayed but divergent. Through these moments, the EU's institutional discourse shifted, but not linearly. This thesis traces those shifts.

To this end, it introduces the Developmentalism-Aggression Response Index (DARI), a novel interpretive and qualitative framework that assesses the EU's discursive responses to Russian aggression across five key episodes between 1994 and 2024. By disaggregating discourse into measurable sub-indicators, ranging from tone to institutional leverage, the DARI enables a multilayered, historically grounded, and theory-informed analysis of change over time.

The central research question guiding this analysis is the following: How has the European Union's institutional discourse evolved in response to Russian aggression between 1994 and 2024, and how has this evolution reflected, reinforced, or disrupted the developmentalist logic underpinning its approach to Russia?

In answering these questions, the thesis makes three contributions. First, it offers an original empirical account of EU discourse across three decades of crises as well as 'peace periods'. Second, it reinterprets the carefully collected official discourse through the lens of developmentalism, while in the process, revealing its strengths, blind spots, and drawbacks. Third, it provides a methodological innovation by combining critical discourse analysis with an interpretive index framework (DARI), aimed at thorough assessment and identification of causality between how the EU view Russia's force projections over time, what role it attributed to Russia in these crises and as a result, how it portrayed its future goals pertaining to the relationship with Russia as a state-in-transition or as an aggressor.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

From the moment Brussels christened its relationship with Russia a "strategic partnership"⁶, scholars have been trying to capture the nature of this relationship. Therefore, over time, there has been a contest over labels: strategic partnership, "master-pupil [relations]", "marriage of convenience", "negative interdependence", "partnership that's failed", "cold peace", "from hidden other to open rivalry", to name a few. Each of these labels encodes a different theory of

⁶ European Council, Common Strategy of the European Union of 4 June 1999 on Russia (1999/414/CFSP), *Official Journal of the European Communities*, (1999): 1–10. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=oj%3AJOL_1999_157_R_0001_001&utm_source

change and a diagnosis of failure. Rather than pick one explanation, this chapter shows how the labels accumulate and set the base for the analysis.

The following literature review is selective by design. Given the sheer scale of the research field, encyclopedic coverage would be neither feasible, nor useful. Instead, this chapter focuses on works that shape the core debate the paper aims to tackle: how the relationship has been conceptualised (what has bound EU and Russia together?), when the things changed and why. In this vein, scholars tend to see the EU-Russia relationship as shaped chiefly by three intertwined elements: a) interests and interdependence, b) identity and ideology and c) power and security. Where these strands converge and where they clash set the stage for my argument about the EU's developmentalist lens, DARI scaling and the subsequent analysis.

Asymmetric partnership and two false dawns

Formative years of the 1990s, when the EU first adopted the *strategic partnership* label was asymmetrical by design. At the time, the EU perceived itself as a transformational power, aimed at helping the post-Soviet countries transition to European model states. In this respect, it was confident that the Partnership-and-Co-operation Agreement (in 1994), and later, the “Four Common Spaces” (in 2003) would also socialise Russia into what Richard Youngs calls the environment not “overtly geopolitical”⁷ because rules, markets and technical assistance were expected to do the heavy lifting. Although, according to Richard Sakwa, “the [European] community [...] wanted a different Russia to the one on offer; while Russia wanted to join the community, but on its own terms.”⁸ In other words, from the EU vantage, Russia had to complete “its systemic transformation into a liberal democracy”⁹; Tom Casier, borrowing Iver B. Neumann's term, characterises this state of play as a “master-pupil” relationship.¹⁰

From Moscow's side, the self-perception was never apprentice-like, though. On the contrary, Russia was seeking to be recognised as a “great power”, the role it had been performing via its permanent seat at the UNSC, its military strength and escalating economic leverage over the EU. More importantly, Russia, an heir of the Romanov empire and the recent successor of the USSR (although confused with its own national identity), always perceived itself a great power. Hence, it was determined to “join the “Historical West”, which by the very act of Russia joining would become a “Greater West”.¹¹

Therefore, from the outset, the relationship sat on a structural mismatch: EU as tutor of shared rules; Russia as status claimant; this prefigures the three logics below.

To keep the chronology intelligible without turning this chapter into a timeline, I adopt Forsberg and Haukkala's (2018) six-phase periodisation of EU-Russia relations as a backdrop: [1] 1992–94 formation and the PCA; [2] 1994–2000 Russia's shift to “multiple partnerships”; [3] 2000–

⁷ R. Youngs. ‘Introduction’, *Europe's Eastern Crisis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 3.

⁸ R. Sakwa. ‘Order without Hegemony’, *Russia against the rest*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 39.

⁹ Ibid, p.11.

¹⁰ T. Casier. ‘The Historical and Ideational Context of the EU-Russia Relationship’, *EU-Russia Relations in Crisis*, (Routledge, 2017), p.21.

¹¹ Sakwa, p. 12.

2004 early Putin optimism; [4] 2004–2008 strain and stagnation (creation of “Moscow-centered system”); [5] 2008–2012 the Medvedev modernisation window; [6] 2012–2014 rupture around Ukraine.¹² For this review two phases stand out, because they serve as the best test cases of whether cooperation could ever outrun the structural discrepancy.

In particular, phase 3 (2000–2004) was characterised with initial optimism about Putin’s first term. His 2001 Bundestag speech, delivered in German, invoked Russia’s “European vocation,” and cooperation deepened on a number of files. In Brussels, this sounded like confirmation that change in governance would positively impact the bilateral relationship, although it never materialised.

As for phase 5 (2008–2012), following the war in Georgia, Medvedev put Russia’s “modernisation” at the centre of the agenda, culminating in the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation. Again, Brussels read this as convergence-by-governance. Yet, in 2010, Dmitri Trenin called this “conservative modernisation” a propaganda tool, a deliberate “buzz word” serving “rent-seeking policies and nationalist goals of the Kremlin elite”¹³; He explained why even favourable atmosphere could not carry a real transformation.

Read together, these two false dawns show how EU repeatedly translated favourable atmospherics into expectations of transformation, while Russia’s status claims and regime incentives pulled in the opposite direction. It is in this cumulative sense: after six non-linear phases consisting of brief upswings with steady hardening that scholars describe the overall trajectory as “*a partnership that failed.*”¹⁴

Economic interests/interdependence

Despite structural mismatch, the economic interests were one of the glues that moved the relationship forward; some academics argue that this relationship’s transactional aspect was, in fact, the *only* real reason that the “strategic partnership” held together. Tom Casier terms this a “marriage of convenience” - a relationship, based on economic gains, especially in energy and trade. This is why, according to him, what started as an “asymmetric relationship”, was replaced with “logic of competition (2004-2013) fuelled by the attributional bias or negative reading of each other’s intentions”, finally turning into a direct confrontation (from late 2013)¹⁵.

Haukkala pushes this further with “negative mutual interdependence”¹⁶: the very pipelines and take-or-pay contracts that were meant to bind the sides instead became leverage, especially for Moscow. In this respect, the gas crises of 2006 and 2009 were early, visible proofs that interdependence could amplify conflict rather than moderate it.

¹² T. Forsberg and H. Haukkala. ‘The European Union’. Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, (Routledge, 2018), p. 270-273.

¹³ D. Trenin. ‘Russia’s Conservative Modernization: A Mission Impossible?’ The SAID Review of International Affairs 30, no.1 (2010), p. 27. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27000208>

¹⁴ M. Siddi. ‘The Partnership That Failed: EU-Russia Relations and the War in Ukraine.’ Journal of European Integration 44 (6) (2022), p. 893–98. doi:10.1080/07036337.2022.2109651

¹⁵ Casier, p. 20-21.

¹⁶ H. Haukkala. ‘Negative Mutual Interdependence? The Clashing Perceptions of EU-Russia Economic Relations. EU-Russia Relations in Crisis, (Routledge, 2017), p.53-66.

On the Russian side, Dmitri Trenin supplies the transactional logic; already in 2007, he defined Russia as one of “the least ideological countries around the world”, where “ideas hardly matter, whereas interests reign supreme.”¹⁷ He claimed that Russia’s aim was to become “a great power [...] organised as a supercorporation”. And that, “from Moscow’s perspective, Russian-Western relations [were] competitive but not antagonistic”¹⁸. This is transactionalism in plain terms.

A deeper political-economy lens reinforces why this glue never neutralised the contest. Alexander Etkind, in his “*Russia against Modernity*” makes the case for a connection between Russia, as a ‘petrostate’ that combines ‘a monopoly on violence with a monopoly on energy’.¹⁹ Under those conditions, interdependence is unlikely to socialise; it is rather likely to be instrumentalised.

Identity and ideas

Trenin’s *homo economicus* describes a huge part of post-Soviet Russia, but it misses the other half of the picture, namely, Russia as a revanchist state. Historically a multinational empire-state rather than a civic nation-state, Russia has long shored up statehood through territory and hierarchy—borders as much argued as drawn; more than 200 ethnic groups stitched into what Benedict Anderson would call an “imagined community”. Nation-building has tended toward russkaia(ethnic) rather than rossiiskaia (civic), and the trauma of the First Chechen War entrenched a fear of disintegration that, as Aleksandr Etkind argues, pushed the centre toward “internal colonisation”²⁰ - tightening control over the periphery to stabilise the core. Seen in this light, Russia’s force projections can hardly be seen as anomalies that a transactional model failed to predict; instead, they are acts of status maintenance.

Historians extend this into a longer civilisational arc. Serhii Plokhy shows how modern Russian nationhood is in its constant quest to find the “lost kingdom”, the key to which has always been Ukraine. This becomes particularly relevant in regard to the annexation of Crimea and war in Eastern Ukraine. Therefore, he warns that peace and stability in Europe and the world will be directly linked to how Russia solves its abiding disjunction between empire and nation.²¹ Timothy Snyder calls the governing outlook “eternity politics”—a looping of Romanov and Soviet legacies—so that remapping the “near abroad” becomes identity work as much as strategy.²²

Identity mattered on the EU side as well. Since the early 1990s the Union operated under François Duchêne’s early idea of “civilian power Europe” - instead of military power, focusing on influencing the world through economic means, civilian standards, and the promotion of

¹⁷ D. Trenin. ‘Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West’. *Washington Quarterly*, 30:2 (2007). P. 95. <https://doi.org/10.1162/wash.2007.30.2.95>

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 96.

¹⁹ A. Etkind. *Russia against Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2023), p.27.

²⁰ A. Etkind. *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience*. (Polity Press: 2011).

²¹ S. Plokhy. *The Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation from 1470 to the Present* (Basic Books: New York, 2017).

²² T. Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018).

democratic and civilised politics. Integration itself was strategy, i.e. widening the acquis, socialising by rules, and reducing incentives for revisionism.

Therefore, instead of replacing the economic lens, identity frames it. The mismatch of self-images helps explain why technocratic cooperation could coexist with periodic use of force. It also sets up the next step in the argument: how these identity filters ran into—and were reinforced by—the security order Europe actually built, from enlargement choices to Lisbon’s defence clauses and the post-2014.

Power and security

A third strand, therefore, foregrounds security architecture, which adds to the divergent lens.

Russia’s baseline in security was unambiguous since the 1990s. Its numerous force projections over time were the security expression of a status claim that Russia never abandoned; and it coexisted with its “business-as-usual” with Europe.

As for the EU, it tried to manage security through governance, although, since 2009 Lisbon Treaty, it started to constitutionalise it. In particular, the Lisbon Treaty made CSDP an “integral part” of the Union (Article 42), and even a mutual-assistance clause (42(7))—legal steps toward a geopolitical Union—but political will and capabilities lagged. Nevertheless, when crisis hit in 2013–14, the EU did change gear, although not directly into geopolitics. Following Richard Youngs, the Union moved “from low to high politics”²³: it braided sanctions, defensive security measures, a more politicised Eastern Partnership, and energy diversification. That was a return of geopolitics on EU terms, which also constituted risk-aversion. Hence, 2014 was an example of EU acting as a “reactive power”²⁴, it responded to Russian moves, which according to critics, resulted in “harsh words, minor sanctions, and not much else”²⁵.

The security lens shows why the partnership could not metabolise the identity clash or the economic interdependence. They coincided with an EU still operating in governance mode and a Russia consolidating status claims within an exclusionary architecture. When the structure was tested, the EU’s response adapted, although, capability surge occurred only post-2022.

Conclusion

Together, these works form a rich but incomplete picture. They identify the collapse of the EU–Russia partnership, the durability of liberal developmentalism, and the eventual rise of geopolitical realism. However, none systematically trace the EU’s discursive evolution toward Russia across specific moments of crisis and stability. This is where the following paper intervenes. By introducing the **Developmentalism–Aggression Response Index (DARI)**, this

²³ Youngs, p. 65.

²⁴ M. K. Davis Cross and I.P. Karolewski. ‘Power Dynamics in EU-Russian Relations’. *European-Russian Power Relations in Turbulent Times* (University of Michigan Press, 2021), p.2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.10202357.3>

²⁵ M.B. Göransson. Russia’s Thinking on New Wars and Its Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine. *Defence Studies* 24 (3): p. 461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2024.2365214>

thesis disaggregates the institutional language of the EU across key episodes of Russian force projection between 1994 and 2024 and in between. It evaluates how policy framing, stated objectives, tone, instruments shaped or ruptured the EU's longstanding developmentalist paradigm. In doing so, it fills a critical gap in understanding not just *what* the EU said, but *why*, *when*, and *how* that transformed.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as the foundation for analysing how the EU's approach to Russian aggression evolved from accommodation to confrontation between 1994 and 2024. By applying established theoretical paradigms, this study seeks to uncover deeper mechanisms behind EU policy shifts and the extent to which underlying ideological assumptions have shaped responses to Russia's actions.

This research employs two primary theoretical approaches: *developmentalism* and *coevolution theory*. Developmentalism, as conceptualised by Richard Norgaard, challenges Western-centric modernisation by critiquing the linear assumption of societal progress. This perspective helps explain how the EU initially viewed Russia as a state-in-transition, expecting that economic liberalisation and institutional reforms would eventually align it with the Western-led liberal order.

In contrast, coevolutionary theory, rooted in biological sciences but adapted to international relations, explains the reciprocal adaptation between the EU and Russia, suggesting that each actor's policies evolved in response to the other's actions. Coevolution reveals why EU-Russia relations unfolded as an iterative process of adaptation rather than as a linear progression toward integration. By combining these two approaches, the presented framework highlights the shortcomings of deterministic developmentalist thinking and examines a unique nature of EU-Russia relations.

Developmentalism

Developmentalism posits that societies follow a structured, linear trajectory toward modernisation, typically modeled after Western democratic and capitalist frameworks. At its core, it assumes that economic liberalisation and institutional reforms inevitably lead to liberal normativity, political stability and democratisation. This notion has shaped international development policies and foreign relations, influencing how major institutions engage with transitioning states. However, despite its widespread adoption, developmentalism has been contested within the field of international relations.

One of the most prominent proponents of this framework was Walt Rostow (1960)²⁶, who, in *The Stages of Economic Growth*, introduced a five-stage model of economic development.

²⁶ Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-03062A001100030001-6.pdf>

His work heavily influenced modernisation theory, which suggests that as economies develop, political democratisation will naturally follow. However, Rostow himself acknowledged that his “stages-of-growth” model was an “arbitrary and limited” framework for interpreting modern history, cautioning that it was “in no absolute sense, a correct way” of understanding societal progress. This only highlights the limitations of developmentalism as a universally applicable theory.

Building upon this premise, Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi²⁷ examined the link between economic growth and democracy, ultimately concluding that “democracy is not a by-product of economic development.” Rather than suggesting that modernisation necessarily generates democracy, they argued that “democracies survive in countries that are modern”—effectively changing the emphasis from development as a causal factor to development as a stabilising condition for democracy.

Further complicating the discourse, Carles Boix and Susan Stokes²⁸ challenge the deterministic link between economic liberalisation and democracy. They emphasise that political institutions, elite bargaining, and historical contingencies play a more significant role in shaping democratic outcomes than economic modernisation alone. Their critique underlines the context-specific nature of political transformations, challenging the notion that a single trajectory of development applies universally across different historical and geopolitical contexts.

Given these debates, this paper adopts Richard Norgaard’s (1994) conceptualisation of **developmentalism**: “the belief in the universality of social progress”²⁹, as a direct critique of the teleological assumptions embedded within earlier modernisation theories. While scholars like Rostow and Przeworski have debated the extent to which economic growth fosters democracy, Norgaard challenges the very premise that progress follows a universal trajectory.

This conceptualisation frames development as a normative and interconnected process, guiding societies from poverty to well-being, in alignment with modernist ideals that emphasize shared progress as the natural course of societal evolution. This paradigm, which has been a cornerstone of the international aid sector, assumes a linear progression of development, reflecting Western socio-political and economic models.

Within this framework, political instability is often viewed as a secondary concern, merely a temporary disruption in an otherwise orderly pattern of development.³⁰ This notion, which Mark Duffield terms ‘the second coming of stability’, implies a certitude in the resurgence of stability, leading to “the uncritical advocacy of ‘development’ in increasingly unstable conditions.”³¹ He

²⁷ Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, “Modernization: Theories and Facts,” *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (1997): 155–83, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1997.0004>

²⁸ Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, “Endogenous Democratization,” *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 517–49, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2003.0019>

²⁹ Mark Duffield, “Complex Emergencies and the Crisis of Developmentalism,” Institute of Development Studies, 1994, <https://www.ids.ac.uk/download.php?file=files/dmfile/duffield254.pdf>

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Mark Duffield, “The Symphony of the Damned: Racial Discourse, Complex Political Emergencies and Humanitarian Aid,” *Disasters* 20, no. 3 (1996): 173–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7717.1996.tb01032.x>.

argues that this mindset leads to reinforcing policies that may be ill-suited for regions experiencing prolonged crises.

This critique is particularly relevant in analysing the European Union's engagement with Russia, as developmentalist assumptions shaped policies that often overlooked geopolitical realities vis-à-vis Russia, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The policies implemented in the 1990s up until late 2010s, reflected the belief that market liberalisation and institutional alignment with European norms would gradually transform Russia into a democratic partner. However, this assumption proved overly simplistic, as Russia pursued an alternate trajectory...

Coevolution

If developmentalism assumes a universal trajectory toward modernisation, coevolution provides an alternative framework - one that captures the reciprocal adaptation of political entities within a dynamic, interactive system. Unlike linear models of progress, coevolutionary theory acknowledges that states do not evolve in isolation but co-adapt to each other's policies, choices, and shifting perceptions.

Rooted in biological sciences³², coevolution refers to the mutual adaptation of closely interacting species over time, where "the fitness of the genetic traits within each species is largely governed by the dominant genetic traits of the other". Richard Norgaard extends this concept beyond biology, addressing the meaning of knowledge from a coevolutionary perspective, arguing that societies, economies, and political structures develop in response to one another, rather than progressing through predetermined path. In other words, political entities shape and reshape each other through continuous engagement, resistance, and counterstrategies.

This approach challenges developmentalism by rejecting the assumption that political change is a one-way process leading to convergence. Instead, coevolution highlights that geopolitical actors are engaged in an ongoing process of mutual modification, where their strategies, institutions, and even fundamental worldviews are influenced by their interactions.

A key contribution to coevolution theory comes from Robert Jervis (1997)³³, who conceptualises the international system as a network of competing nation-states in which each actor is embedded in a complex, unpredictable web of interactions. Jervis argues that states do not simply act based on self-contained decision-making but are instead entangled in an adaptive system, where strategic choices trigger iterative reactions, counterreactions, and long-term shifts.

Jervis's emphasis on complexity in international politics aligns closely with coevolutionary logic, particularly in how states do not operate in isolation but mutually shape one another's strategies and long-term trajectories. The difficulty of governing within this system is compounded by the recursive nature of decision-making: when a state makes a move, it must simultaneously anticipate how another state will respond, while also recognising that this

³² Richard B. Norgaard, *Development Betrayed: The End of Progress and a Coevolutionary Revisioning of the Future* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203012406>

³³ Richard A. Posner, "Jervis on Complexity Theory," *Critical Review* 24, no. 3 (2012): 367–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2012.767046>

response is shaped by how the reacting state expects the first actor to react in turn. This dynamic creates a loop of interdependent calculations, in which policies are rarely judged in isolation but rather as part of a changing environment.

Because of this recursive logic, miscalculations are not exceptions but rather structural features of the system. Jervis highlights that leaders often believe they are acting rationally based on available information, yet their assumptions about an opponent's motives, capabilities, and intentions are inherently limited by cognitive biases, incomplete intelligence, and continuity of changing realities. As a result, many decisions that seem rational at the time prove, *ex post*, to be mistaken - not because of individual failure but because of the inherent unpredictability of a system in which every actor is adapting simultaneously.

Jervis's contribution to coevolution would suggest that actors will always resist, reinterpret, or repurpose imposed structures, leading to unintended and often self-reinforcing consequences. This makes long-term stability elusive, as policies that initially appear successful can later produce counteradaptive responses that undermine their effectiveness.

To sum up, developmentalism exposes the EU's early, linear expectations of Russia while coevolution clarifies the mutual adaptations that ultimately drove the shift from accommodation to confrontation. The next chapter sets out the methodology of the DARI Framework, translating these insights into measurable indicators, scoring procedures, and source selection to trace EU discourse from 1994–2024.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative, interpretivist research design, built upon discourse analysis and framed within the theory of developmentalism. It sets out to explore the evolution of the European Union's response to Russian aggression from 1994 to 2024.

The core analytical stance is that the EU's foreign policy toward Russia cannot be fully understood through policy outputs or event-based chronologies alone. Instead, the analysis privileges the language of EU institutions: their vocabularies, silences, moral framings, and changing visions regarding the future relations. This choice rests on two assumptions: [1] The EU external action is fundamentally discursive in nature, underpinned by self-ascribed roles, values, and narratives. [2] The policy change within the EU often emerges incrementally, through progressive rhetorical adaptation rather than abrupt institutional rupture.

To operationalise this inquiry, the study builds a longitudinal empirical dataset of high-level EU discourse, beginning with the First Chechen War and culminating in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Five major instances of Russian force projection serve as the backbone of the analysis: Chechnya I (1994–1996), Chechnya II (1999–2004), Georgia (2008), Ukraine–Crimea/Donbas (2014), and Ukraine (2022–2024).

A novel component of this research design is the **Developmentalism-Aggression Response Index (DARI)**, an original conceptual framework developed to map the EU's shifting engagement with Russia across both discursive and strategic dimensions. It captures how EU institutions have interpreted Russian aggression, how they have framed their own role in response, and whether these responses reflect continuity with the EU's earlier developmentalist worldview or signal its erosion.

3.2 Data Sources

Given the EU's institutional complexity and the supranational character of its foreign policy machinery, the challenge of capturing a coherent picture of 'EU perceptions' is non-trivial. There is no single voice; instead, there exists a multi-vocal ensemble of narratives, emanating from different branches and instruments of the EU.

This is precisely why; the study focuses on institutional texts that reflect the EU's highest political consensus and formalised outlook. The selected sources include:

- **EUCO Summaries (1994–2024):** The European Council conclusions offer the clearest articulation of the EU's strategic direction on the highest level.
- **CFSP Annual Reports (1998–2024):** Published by the Council, these reports give insight into how policy was framed and implemented on a yearly basis, particularly in relation to Russia.
- **EU-Russia Summit Joint Statements and Post-Summit Remarks:** These are used to assess bilateral tone and narrative convergence (or divergence).
- **European Parliament Resolutions on Human Rights in the World:** Non-binding yet significant, these documents reflect critical internal voices within the EU apparatus.

While this focus excludes national-level perspectives, it enables the identification of institutional discourse patterns that reflect the EU's evolving self-conception vis-à-vis Russia. Taken together, these sources form a coherent discursive archive through which the EU's foreign policy trajectory can be interpreted. More importantly, it is directly responsive to the main question: *How has the EU's perception of and response to Russian aggression evolved over time, and how has developmentalism shaped and been challenged by this evolution?*

3.2.1 Case selection rationale & timeline

The selection of the five case studies: Chechnya I (1994–1996), Chechnya II (1999–2004), Georgia (2008), Crimea/Donbas (2014), and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (2022–2024) is not accidental, nor purely chronological. These episodes were chosen because they serve as discursive flashpoints: moments when the European Union was compelled to recalibrate the way it speaks about, imagines, and engages with Russia.

Each episode prompted some degree of rhetorical, strategic or normative reckoning within EU institutions. More importantly, these are the moments where the EU's self-image as a normative actor committed to peace, human rights, and the rule of law, was put to the test, sometimes subtly, other times explosively.

Crucially, the study does not aim to catalogue every Russian military intervention, nor does it equate significance with visibility. Rather, the chosen cases stand out because they triggered what this study terms discursive transformation—visible shifts in how the EU framed Russia’s actions, its own role, and the future of the relationship.

In this regard, although the First Chechen War (1994–1996) and Second Chechen War (1999–2004) were formally internal Russian conflicts, they were selected as the analytical starting point for three reasons. Firstly, 1994 marks the adoption of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), making it methodologically sound to begin the analysis at this point. While CFSP annual reports are only available online from 1998 onward, anchoring the study in 1994 ensures coherence with the institutional framework of EU foreign policy. Secondly, the first war coincided with the early stages of EU-Russia political engagement (signing of Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in June 1994) and therefore represents a baseline for how the EU interpreted Russian use of force in relation to its values-based external identity. Second, the EU’s discursive silence or cautious framing during these wars reveal early tensions between its commitment to human rights and its desire to engage Russia as a partner. In short, these wars laid the groundwork for later contradictions to unfold.

As for the timeline, the endpoint of 2024 is not meant to imply closure in EU–Russia relations—nor to suggest that the full-scale invasion of Ukraine has reached a resolution. Instead, the cutoff reflects both an operational research boundary and a thematic arc: it allows the study to capture the three-decade-long evolution since 1994, culminating in what is arguably the most transformative rupture in EU foreign policy discourse since the end of the Cold War. Methodologically speaking, 2024 is the year for which the latest CFSP annual report is available, but regardless, going beyond 2024 would risk introducing speculative interpretations, as newer documents would not yet reflect stabilised institutional narratives.

3.3 Operationalising the DARI & scoring grid

The DAR Index is the central analytical tool of this thesis, which allows to track the evolution of the EU’s approach toward Russian aggression. As mentioned above, perceptions—particularly those of a collective actor like the EU—cannot be directly observed. But they can be interpreted from discourse, especially when institutional texts are carefully selected and compared over time.

Rather than relying on binary categories—hawkish vs. dovish, realist vs. idealist—the DARI breaks this transformation into five analytically distinct dimensions. Each dimension captures a different layer of the EU’s discourse: how it frames aggression, what goals it pursues, the tone it adopts, the instruments it deploys, and the worldview that underpins its decisions. These are operationalised through 11 sub-indicators, each scored on a 1–3–5 scale, where **1** signifies accommodation or optimism, and **5** reflects rupture/confrontation.

It responds directly to the research question’s ambition to track a shift from accommodation to confrontation. In particular, policy framing and tone of engagement track perception; objectives and instruments reflect policy evolution; and underlying logic ties it back to the theory of developmentalism.

Below is the breakdown of five indicators of DARI along with 11 sub-indicators:

1. Policy Framing: *How does the EU describe what has occurred, and who is responsible?*

This dimension gauges the EU's language when interpreting Russia's actions. It is where the EU performs the act of naming and framing: whether it chooses to moralise, condemn, or remain vague; whether it blames or avoids assigning blame. This indicator speaks beyond the rhetorical tone and attempts to grasp the EU's broader worldview: is Russian aggression an unfortunate accident?

| Sub-indicators | Score | Description |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Normative labelling <i>(How morally charged is the EU's vocabulary when describing aggression?)</i> | 1 – Silence/Vague concern | Language expresses unease without normative judgement. |
| | 3 – Symbolic denunciation | Language references breaches of law, but avoids moral condemnation. |
| | 5 – Moral outrage | Aggression is labeled in moral terms (inhumane, illegal, brutal). Use of ethical framing. |
| Attribution of responsibility <i>(Whose fault is it, and how clearly does the EU state this?)</i> | 1 – Silence/Deflective framing | The EU avoids assigning blame. Mentions are vague or technical, with no reference to Russia's agency. |
| | 3 – Diffuse attribution | The EU indirectly acknowledges Russia's role, but avoids direct accusation. Blame is softened or passive, often referencing norms or obligations. |
| | 5 – Direct accountability framing | The EU clearly identifies the Russian state as responsible, using direct and assertive language that connects aggression to state policy. |

2. EU Objectives: *What does the EU seek in its relationship with Russia?*

This indicator shifts the focus from rhetoric to underlying intentions. It captures the EU's long-term vision for its partnership with Russia, and how far it is willing to go to preserve cooperation even in the face of violence.

| Sub-indicators | Score | Description |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Vision of the relationship <i>(What is the long-term vision of the EU in regard to Russia?)</i> | 1 – Shared integration pathway | The EU sees Russia as a core, long-term partner in building a shared political and security order. Cooperation is framed as strategic and future-oriented. |
| | 3 – Conditional engagement | The EU expresses interest in cooperation but links it to reforms, rule of law, or geopolitical alignment. Language includes ifs, buts, and concerns. |
| | 5 – Decoupled future | The EU explicitly distances itself from Russia as a future partner. Russia is seen as |

| | | |
|--|----------------------------------|---|
| | | fundamentally incompatible with the EU’s vision of order. Engagement is replaced by risk management and containment. |
| Stabilitocracy vs. Human rights <i>(What is the EU willing to tolerate for the sake of ‘stability’?)</i> | 1 – Stability at any cost | The EU stays silent or soft on rights abuses because it sees keeping Russia “on board” as more important. Stability and cooperation trump values. |
| | 3 – Walking the tightrope | The EU acknowledges problems like human rights violations but avoids strong consequences. It tries to have it both ways — values in words, partnership in practice. |
| | 5 – Values come first | The EU draws a clear line: it speaks out boldly and takes action — even if it means risking relations with Russia. |
| Security with vs against Russia <i>(Does the EU see Russia as part of Europe’s security architecture or as the reason it needs one?)</i> | 1 – Partner in European security | Russia is cast as an integral part of Europe’s peace architecture. Russia is seen as a partner in building European or global stability, with integration into Western frameworks being a desired goal. |
| | 3 – Hedged engagement | The EU mixes cooperative language with signs of caution. Russia is included in dialogue and agreements, but the EU also begins referencing the need to mitigate risks or expresses doubt about full alignment. |
| | 5 – Russia as adversary | The EU explicitly presents Russia as a threat or adversary. Policy language focuses on defending against Russian actions, strengthening internal EU resilience, and building alliances to contain Russia’s influence. |

3. Tone of Engagement: *How sharp is the EU’s voice — and how serious is the ask?*

While policy framing reveals what the EU says, this indicator examines how it says it. Is the tone reserved and conciliatory, or bold and confrontational? More than style, this category reveals the emotional and diplomatic temperature of EU discourse.

| Sub-indicators | Score | Description |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Tone and Vocabulary <i>(Style and emotional temperature of the</i> | 1 – Accommodative | The EU uses mild, generic, or technical language with no emotional or political edge. |
| | 3 – Critical | Critique is present, but softened by continued reference to cooperation or mutual interests. |

| | | |
|--|------------------------|---|
| <i>EU's communication; How sharp or cautious is the EU's voice?)</i> | 5 – Confrontational | The EU adopts a bold, politically assertive tone. Language becomes more emotionally charged and accusatory. |
| Appeals vs. Demands <i>(Posture of the EU in relation to Russia; how strong is the ask?)</i> | 1 – Soft encouragement | The EU frames its communication as polite requests or aspirations. There are no consequences attached. |
| | 3 – Firm warning | The EU issues warnings, resolutions, or political statements that indicate disapproval but lack enforceable threat. |
| | 5 – Explicit demands | The EU sets clear expectations, makes formal demands, or draws public red lines. The message is: "Do this, or there will be repercussions." |

4. Instruments used: *What tools does the EU emphasise? Do the words turn into action?*

This indicator moves from words to action — or inaction. It focuses on whether — and how — the EU adjusts its tangible instruments: funding, treaties, summits, and conditionality.

| Sub-indicators | Score | Description |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Aid/support adjustments <i>(What happens to EU financial flows when Russia acts (has acted) aggressively?)</i> | 1 – Centripetal (Toward Russia) | The EU continues or even expands aid, funding, or technical assistance to Russia. |
| | 3 – Lateral (Around Russia) | EU assistance is redirected e.g., from long-term development to humanitarian response, civil society or conflict-monitoring and stabilisation missions in the wider region. |
| | 5 – Centrifugal (Away from Russia) | EU financial instruments become explicitly conflict-linked, a vector of <i>separation</i> exemplified by freezing the flows to Russia and/or redirecting massively toward the victims of Russian aggression. |
| Institutional leverage <i>(To what extent does the EU adjust the structure of its institutional engagement with Russia?)</i> | 1 – Business-as-usual | Institutional relations remain unaffected: summits go ahead, trade negotiations continue, and no official concern is raised in formal agreements. |
| | 3 – Cooling phase | The EU delays or slows processes — ratifications, summits, agreements — as signals of disapproval, but without legal consequences. |
| | 5 – Hard leverage | The EU introduces explicit conditionality, suspends institutional agreements or introduces sanctions, tied to Russia's |

aggression. Re-engagement is made dependent on behavioral change.

5. Underlying Logic of Action: *What is the epistemic basis for the EU's approach?*

The final indicator interprets whether the discourse assumes Russia can be transformed through integration and dialogue (developmentalism) or whether it presumes containment and deterrence (securitised logic).

| Sub-indicators | Score | Description |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| Framing of Russia's nature <i>(How does the EU describe Russia's political character and trajectory?)</i> | 1 – Reformable partner | Developmentalist logic: EU sees Russia as a transitional state on a linear path to democracy. |
| | 3 – Ambivalent actor | Pragmatic logic: Russia is seen as drifting but potentially correctable through selective engagement or economic ties. |
| | 5 – Challenger | Containment logic: Russia is perceived as authoritarian, beyond reform through engagement. |
| Interpretation of force projections <i>(How does the EU interpret acts of Russian aggression or militarisation?)</i> | 1 – Isolated incident | Violence is seen as anomaly, temporary and exceptional. |
| | 3 – Patterned behaviour | Aggression is recognised as recurring but is interpreted through the lens of instability rather than intent. |
| | 5 – Doctrine | EU sees use of force as part of Russia's long-term geopolitical strategy |

The index thus captures both the quantity and quality of EU engagement and its alignment (or misalignment) with its stated values and objectives. For each case study, average DARI scores are calculated by aggregating all valid indicator scores across each coded institutional document and dividing by the total number of entries.

3.4 Analytical Approach

The analysis proceeds in two stages.

First, a close textual reading is conducted for each EUCO summary and CFSP report between 1994 and 2024. All references to Russia, Chechnya, Georgia, Crimea, Donbas, and Ukraine are extracted and contextualised. Each document is then scored across all 11 sub-indicators, with justification notes explaining the logic behind each score. In this respect, table of scoring with detailed justifications for each EUCO Conclusion and CFSP Report can be accessed [here](#).

Second, these coded scores are aggregated to form a DARI profile for each episode of aggression, as well as “peace periods” in between. This enables both intra-case analysis (how the EU handled a single event) and inter-case comparison (how responses evolved across time).

Importantly, the peace periods – the intervals between episodes of open conflict, are far from discursive voids. These periods offer a window into how the EU remembers, forgets, or reframes past aggression.

In the DARI framework, all 11 sub-indicators remain applicable during these intervals. The scoring does not rely on conflict being actively mentioned; instead, it reads the tone, framing, and vocabulary of institutional discourse through the lens of what is and what is not said about Russia. For instance, if references to Russia are overwhelmingly cooperative, optimistic, or partnership-focused despite recent aggression, this is scored as low (1–2) across indicators like *vision of the relationship*, *underlying logic*, and *policy framing*. If Russia disappears from key discussions altogether, the omission itself is treated as analytically significant silence, often signalling accommodation. Thus, peace periods are not scored by absence alone, but by the quality of presence or silence. They help trace the EU’s narrative elasticity—how quickly it moves to rebuild bridges, how it frames stability, and how much of its previous rhetoric it is willing to forget.

To ensure analytical consistency, coding was conducted iteratively and triangulated where possible against other institutional outputs, such as European Parliament resolutions and EU-Russia summit statements. While the primary emphasis lies on EUCO and CFSP texts, this broader corpus enhances the reliability and interpretive richness of the findings.

Rather than claim full objectivity, this methodology foregrounds *transparency*, *coherence*, and *analytical sharpness*. It seeks not only to show that the EU changed its stance toward Russia, but *how*, *when*, and *why* those shifts occurred, and what they reveal about the limits of developmentalism as a guiding logic of EU foreign policy.

3.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged in the design and execution of this study. Firstly, the research is limited to publicly accessible English-language texts, which might omit relevant multilingual documentation.

Secondly, the analysis presupposes the EU as a coherent institutional actor. This overlooks the fact that key decisions often reflect intra-EU compromises. This choice is intentional, nonetheless. By prioritising institutional narratives, the study foregrounds how the EU as a collective actor chooses to present its foreign policy, while acknowledging that behind each official position lies an intricate process of negotiations.

It is also noteworthy to mention that coding political language inherently involves interpretation, particularly for high-level diplomatic discourse that is often deliberately ambiguous. To ensure analytical consistency, all of the documents were coded iteratively, with intra-case and inter-case validation to calibrate scoring across time and context. While the analysis is qualitative and interpretive by design, it adheres to a systematic, transparent, and replicable framework. Rather than claiming neutrality or mechanical objectivity, the approach prioritises conceptual coherence, methodological clarity, and discursive sensitivity.

Finally, the DARI assigns equal weight to each of the 11 sub-indicators, reflecting a deliberate choice in favour of transparency, analytical consistency, and replicability across cases and time periods. This approach avoids introducing subjective judgments about the relative importance of discursive versus instrumental signals and maintains methodological clarity in aggregating institutional reactions. With that being said, it must be acknowledged that not all sub-indicators necessarily carry the same real-world significance. A change in institutional leverage or in imposing sanctions, for instance, may indicate a more profound policy change than a conciliatory tone or symbolic language. Although the index treats these layers equally in numerical terms, the qualitative analysis supporting it provides additional interpretive weight where appropriate. Weighted scoring is an area where future versions of the framework may try to more accurately reflect the hierarchy of these responses in EU foreign policy discourse.

Chapter 4: Empirical Case Studies

4.1. DARI Profile: First Chechen War (1994–1996)

Average DARI Score: 1.2

The EU's response to the First Chechen War was significant for two reasons: on one hand, the conflict coincided with a landmark moment in EU–Russia relations—the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1994, representing the birth of what the EU termed a “*strategic partnership*”. On the other, it immediately tested the EU's credibility as a normative power, particularly in light of the war's devastating toll on civilians, and Russia's disregard for human rights.

Despite the violence that erupted in December 1994, the EU's highest-level discourse over the next two years remained remarkably restrained, euphemistic, and integrationist. In terms of DARI scoring, the First Chechen War ranks among the **most accommodationist episodes** in the EU's post-Cold War history of Russia relations. The Union remained deeply embedded in the belief that Russia was a *reformable partner*, and that its violence could be navigated (or more accurately, discursively contained) without undermining the integration agenda.

Framing without condemnation

Throughout the 1994–1996 period, the EU's policy framing of the war was muted and cautious. At the Essen European Council in December 1994 at the time when there had been a significant escalation in November and early December, resulting in heavy bombardments of Chechnya, there was no mention of this happening at all. Instead, the EU lauded a “*sustained constructive dialogue and partnership*”³⁴ and praised Russia as “*an essential element in the maintenance of peace, security and stability in Europe.*”³⁵

³⁴ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions – European Council Meeting in Essen, 9–10 December 1994*. Brussels: European Council, 1994. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/ess1_en.htm

³⁵ *Ibid*

Even when Chechnya was included in the narrative, for instance, at the 1995 Cannes Summit, the tone remained deferential: the Council noted “*that progress has been made in regard to the situation in Chechnya*”³⁶, a phrase that implicitly accepted the Russian narrative of internal stabilization without the mention of human rights being violated.

Only in December 1996, at the Dublin European Council, did the EU begin to use marginally more normative language, commending the “withdrawal of Russian troops” and noting the intention to hold elections in Chechnya³⁷. Still, even then, the Council stopped short of attributing any blame, referring instead to factual positive developments without reflecting on the preceding devastation. In DARI terms, this entire period scores low on normative labelling and attribution of responsibility, rarely moving beyond symbolic concern or vague references to “challenges.”

A long-term vision unshaken by war

It is interesting how the EU’s vision of the relationship with Russia remained entirely intact throughout the war. The PCA, signed after difficult negotiations in June 1994, was consistently presented as a foundational document for a shared political and security order. The EUCO conclusions repeatedly reaffirmed the intention to build a “*close and balanced relationship*”³⁸ and “*substantial partnership*”^{39,40} with Russia.

Similarly, December 1995 Madrid Council reiterated that it “trusts that Russia will continue its action to promote stability, development, peace and democracy”⁴¹. Therefore, even in the face of atrocities, the Union continued to frame Russia as a future-oriented, reformable state. The war in Chechnya did not feature as a challenge to this vision. It was never mentioned in the context of democracy or human rights obligations.

Vocabulary

The European Parliament was vocal in condemning Russian aggression against civilians in Chechnya in its resolution on Human Rights in the world in 1993-1994. It *urged* the EU and its Member States to exert meaningful pressure on Russia and rejected the passive international response to what it recognised as serious violations of humanitarian norms. The resolution went further, demanding that human rights clauses in EU agreements with third countries—such as Russia—be meaningfully enforced, and explicitly welcomed the suspension of the interim PCA

³⁶ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions – European Council Meeting in Cannes, 26–27 June 1995*. Brussels: European Council, 1995. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/can1_en.htm

³⁷ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions – European Council Meeting in Dublin, 13–14 December 1996*. Brussels: European Council, 1996. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/dub1_en.htm

³⁸ *European Council Meeting in Cannes, 26–27 June 1995*.

³⁹ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions – European Council Meeting in Florence, 21–22 June 1996*. Brussels: European Council, 1996. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/fir1_en.htm

⁴⁰ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions – European Council Meeting in Madrid, 15–16 December 1995*. Brussels: European Council, 1995. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/mad1_en.htm

⁴¹ *Ibid*

ratification process as a necessary move in light of Russia's actions.⁴² In its 1995-1996 resolution, the Parliament again denounced the "slow pace of human rights reforms in Russia,"⁴³ naming Chechnya as a particularly concerning case.

Despite all this, the Council and therefore, the EU took a markedly different approach. In DARI scoring, the "Stabilitocracy vs. Human Rights" sub-indicator rarely climbs above 1. There is virtually no reference to human rights violations in the EUCO texts, and where values like "democracy" or "pluralism"⁴⁴ are mentioned (as in the EU Strategy for Future EU/Russia Relations adopted in 1995), they are aspirational conditions for continued engagement. Therefore, the EU's use of rights language appears merely symbolic.

Tone and tools

Throughout the First Chechen War, the European Union's discourse remained consistently warm and optimistic. Council conclusions repeatedly leaned on the language of "*constructive dialogue*"⁴⁵ and "*fruitful cooperation*,"⁴⁶ giving the clear impression that the bilateral relationship was advancing undeterred. In official documents, there were no demands, no red lines, and no indication that the violence unfolding in Chechnya posed any threat to the EU's strategic trajectory with Russia. The tone was persistently deferential.

At the level of instruments and institutional action, this accommodationist stance was largely mirrored. Summits proceeded as planned, new bilateral frameworks were launched. Most EUCO conclusions during this period contain no mention of suspending aid, delaying agreements, or reconsidering the terms of engagement.

Nonetheless, this narrative of total continuity contains one subtle but interesting exception. In late 1994, following Russia's military assault on Grozny, the EU made the decision to delay the ratification of the freshly signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The PCA, finalised at the Corfu Summit after nearly two years of negotiation, had been heralded as the legal and political foundation for a new strategic partnership. Importantly, it linked cooperation to shared commitments to democracy and human rights—principles that were being blatantly violated in Chechnya.

The delay was brief, but it still marked the *only* moment during the First Chechen War in which EU institutional discourse hinted at leverage. For a moment, the EU activated the political clause embedded in the PCA and decided to respond with something more than words. However, rather than holding the line, the EU opted for a workaround: in 1996, it adopted an Interim Agreement that allowed the trade and economic components of the PCA to enter into force while shelving

⁴² European Parliament. *Resolution on Human Rights in the World in 1993–1994 and the Union's Human Rights Policy*, 20 March 1995. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:51995IP0078&qid=1746880126929>

⁴³ European Parliament. *Resolution on Human Rights in the World in 1995–1996 and the Union's Human Rights Policy*. 28 October 1996. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A51996IP0400&qid=1746880126929>

⁴⁴ *European Council Meeting in Madrid, 15–16 December 1995*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ *European Council Meeting in Florence, 21–22 June 1996*.

the political dimension. This move effectively decoupled economic cooperation from democratic accountability, something that served Russia's interests perfectly. By 1997, the full PCA was ratified without any formal reference to Chechnya or consequences for the violence.

As scholars have noted⁴⁷, this decision reflected a pragmatic, and even cynical, Realpolitik stance. The EU's eagerness to press ahead with partnership, even while war crimes were unfolding, undermined the credibility of the PCA's political conditionality before it had even entered into force. What was framed as a principled delay ended up reinforcing the logic of business-as-usual.

Conclusion

The EU's response to the First Chechen War was not a successful case for EU demonstrating the imperative nature of its values. In theory, the PCA elevated democracy and human rights to a "*leading principle*" of EU-Russia relations. In practice, these principles proved malleable, subordinated to the belief that long-term integration would succeed where immediate pressure might fail.

The war never shifted the EU's underlying logic of action. Russia remained a reformable partner. The war remained an isolated incident. And the EU's vocabulary remained rooted in optimism, engagement, and institutional momentum. The DARI score of 1.2 reflects not just what the EU said, but what it chose not to say.

4.2. DARI Profile: Interwar Period (1997-1999)

Average DARI Score: 1.03

The period between the First and Second Chechen Wars, 1997 through mid-1999, is often treated as a peaceful time in Russia–EU relations, a period sandwiched between two brutal conflicts. However, this view obscures the extent to which the EU doubled down on its accommodationist attitudes, not only maintaining but expanding its political, economic, and institutional integration with Russia. Far from a passive interval, these years represent a paramount phase in which the EU's long-term developmentalist vision for Russia solidified, where Russia was treated as more than merely a partner - an inevitable success story in progress.

Silence as strategy

Across all relevant EUCOs from Amsterdam (1997) through Cologne (1999), the EU rarely moved beyond vague or aspirational normative language. During the unresolved aftermath of the First Chechen War, the Union largely abstained from using ethical or moral judgement in its official discourse. For example, in Amsterdam the EU noted "with satisfaction the active

⁴⁷ Christophe Hillion, "Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between the European Union and the New Independent States of the Ex-Soviet Union," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 3, no. 3 (1998): 399–420, as cited in Hiski Haukkala, *The Making of the European Union's Common Strategy on Russia*, Working Paper No. 28 (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2000), p. 8, <https://www.bits.de/EURA/wp28.pdf>

development of dialogue between the EU and Russia” and reaffirmed “the fundamental importance [of] the development of political and economic relations”.⁴⁸

By June 1999, the Common Strategy on Russia further consolidated this indulgent posture. While it finally verbalised EU “strategic goals” such as democracy, rule of law, and institutional reform, it did so without retrospective judgment. The phrase “*to enhance democracy, institution-building and the rule of law in Russia, which is a prerequisite for the development of a market economy*”⁴⁹ appears in the strategy (Part II), yet it is framed purely aspirationally, not as a demand grounded in past misconduct. Causality is entirely absent. The EU’s reluctance to attribute responsibility for the conflict just a few years back solidified its reputation as a permissive actor in this phase.

Vision and Objectives

Throughout this period, the EU clung tightly to the “shared integration pathway” narrative: In Amsterdam, Russia was framed as a “*fundamental contributor to the development of a new European security architecture*”⁵⁰. The Cardiff and Vienna summits doubled down particularly on the economic part of this path: “The European Council continues to back the active engagement of the IMF and the World Bank in support of Russian reforms”⁵¹ and praises “credible and sustained market-based reforms”⁵².

The Cologne Summit where the EU introduced its first Common Strategy on Russia—epitomised these developments and turned into doctrine. It referred to Russia as “returning to its rightful place in the European family,”⁵³ spoke of “shared values enshrined in the common heritage of European civilisation,”⁵⁴ and emphasised “ever closer cooperation.”⁵⁵ The report read: “a stable, democratic and prosperous Russia, firmly anchored in a united Europe... is essential to lasting peace on the continent”⁵⁶. There was no reckoning with the unresolved violence in Chechnya, as if it had never even occurred and certainly no pivot in the EU’s core strategic vision.

The principal EU objectives—consolidation of democracy, rule of law, and market reform—were framed exclusively in positive terms. Russia was seen as reformable, rational, and European by nature. As a result, the sub-indicators on “vision of the relationship,” “framing of Russia’s

⁴⁸ European Council, *European Council Meeting in Amsterdam, 16–17 June 1997, Presidency Conclusions* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/ams1_en.htm

⁴⁹ European Council, *European Council Meeting in Cologne, 3–4 June 1999: Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/kol2_en.htm

⁵⁰ *European Council Meeting in Amsterdam, 16–17 June 1997.*

⁵¹ European Council, *European Council Meeting in Cardiff, 15–16 June 1998, Presidency Conclusions* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/car1_en.htm#6

⁵² European Council, *European Council Meeting in Vienna, 11–12 December 1998, Presidency Conclusions* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/wie1_en.htm

⁵³ European Council Meeting in Cologne, 3–4 June 1999.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

nature,” and “interpretation of force projection” remained static at 1 across all five sources assessed.

Values vs Stability

As mentioned above, Cologne summit introduced the only time where the EU adopted somewhat stronger value-based language, referencing “rule of law,” “pluralism,” “civil society,” and “human rights.” However, these were presented as objectives the EU wished to *support*, not enforce. The document employs the phrase “to strengthen public institutions... to safeguard human rights,” but crucially, does not make aid or engagement conditional upon these reforms. This merit earns Cologne a modestly higher score (2) for *Normative Labelling* and *Stabilitocracy vs. Human Rights*.

Similarly, the CFSP Annual Report (1998) provides no mention of Chechnya, characterises the relations as a “strategic partnership”, reiterates Russia’s importance in “enhanced ties”, and discusses issues like the OSCE and arms control with technical diplomacy, devoid of ethical framing⁵⁷. Nowhere do the mention of values eclipse the deeper logic of stability and partnership. Even the European Parliament’s Resolution on Human Rights (1998) merely states that “recent developments in Asia and Russia have shown that democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights are essential elements for the development of a sound economic base”.⁵⁸ All of the mentioned deliberations prove that even when values are present in the discourse, they are either diluted or compartmentalised.

Unmoved and unconditional instruments

Every instrument of engagement was deployed without caveats; no material adjustment to support, engagement, or institutional leverage occurred during these years. Instruments like TACIS, PCA, regional cooperation programs, and food assistance continued unabated. If anything, the Common Strategy represents a deepening of these mechanisms.

The Russia strategy, adopted in Cologne, did not offer any hard triggers either, just a vast expansion of programming (e.g., judiciary reform, civil society support, economic integration) under the assumption that Russia would comply naturally. This consistency anchors the sub-indicators for “Appeal vs Demand,” “Aid/Support Adjustment,” and “Institutional Leverage” firmly at 1.

Conclusion

The in-between war years represent the high watermark of EU developmentalism vis-à-vis Russia. The DARI score of 1.03 reflects a policy viewpoint, characterised with optimism and moral ambivalence. The EU believed that *support plus time* would turn Russia into a liberal democracy. But this period also laid the foundations for the EU’s surprise when the Second

⁵⁷ Council of the European Union, *Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Main Aspects and Basic Choices of the CFSP (1998)* <https://aei.pitt.edu/43156/1/A7171.pdf>

⁵⁸ European Parliament, *Resolution on Chechnya*, 6 July 1998 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:51998IP0410>

Chechen War erupted. The absence of confrontation, the silence on force, and the hollow invocation of shared values all contributed to a policy framework deeply vulnerable to betrayal.

4.3. DARI Profile: Second Chechen War (1999–2004)

Average DARI Score: 1.48

The vocabulary of Europe about Russia’s second war in Chechnya can be described as a transition from moral outrage to toning down to managerialism, and finally, learned oblivion. Interestingly, the scale of violence is not the reason for this shift, it remains ferocious throughout; what does change, though, is Brussels’ growing willingness to keep Russia inside its favourite storyline: strategic partner in the making. Once this meta-narrative hardens, every subsequent massacre has to fit the script or be written out of it...

Policy framing and Tone

At the outbreak of the war in late 1999, the EU briefly adopted an unusually direct and critical tone. The December Helsinki European Council denounced Russia’s “intense bombardments of Chechen cities,” declaring them “totally unacceptable” and “in contradiction with humanitarian law.” It warned that “the fight against terrorism cannot under any circumstances warrant [...] that a whole population be considered as terrorist”⁵⁹ and even suspended provisions of the PCA. The Council demanded compliance with humanitarian law and linked progress in EU–Russia relations to Russia’s obligations, by stating that “Russia *must* live up to its obligations if the strategic partnership is to be developed”.

By 2000, however, this sharpness gradually but rapidly receded. Already at Helsinki, retreat was foreshadowed by the caveat that the EU “does not question the right of Russia to preserve its territorial integrity nor its right to fight against terrorism” and by affirmations that Russia remained “a major partner.” At Santa Maria da Feira (2000), responsibility for atrocities was blurred into abstractions: there were “human rights abuses” but no wrongdoer. The Council merely “urged a political solution” and called on Russia to avoid “excessive use of force any spill-over of the conflict”⁶⁰ as if it were a neutral, third-party only responsible for better managing the outcomes of the conflict. Similarly, in the CFSP 1999 and 2000, Russia’s agency is acknowledged, but it avoids direct blame for the violence. The fact that Vladimir Putin is repeatedly engaged and even praised for commitments (e.g., “[Putin] committed himself to seek a political solution to the *Chechnya problem*”)⁶¹ subtly places trust in Russia’s good faith, rather than naming it as a perpetuator of the violence.

This softening in tone is further exemplified at the October 2000 EU–Russia Summit. The joint declaration affirmed “the need to seek a political solution... with due regard for the sovereignty

⁵⁹ European Council, *Presidency Conclusions: Helsinki European Council, 10–11 December 1999*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel2_en.htm#II

⁶⁰ European Council, *Presidency Conclusions: Santa Maria da Feira European Council, 19–20 June 2000*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/fei1_en.htm

⁶¹ Council of the European Union, *Annual Report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy 2000* (Brussels, 2000), https://aei.pitt.edu/43158/1/CFSP_2000.pdf

and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.”⁶² On its face, this appeared to acknowledge the conflict, but substantively it reinforced Russia’s territorial claims while stripping the war of urgency and accountability. Putin in his post-summit remarks immediately reframed the state of play for his domestic audience, declaring that Russia “opposes contacts with terrorists and criminals” whose hands were “up to their elbows in blood,” insisting that “there are no large-scale hostilities,” a brazen mischaracterisation given that Grozny had been razed months earlier. And he introduced Akhmat Kadyrov, a former rebel-turned-collaborator, as the Kremlin-approved face of “political solution.” This was a bait-and-switch performance by Russia, which used the summit as a legitimising stage.

The period from 2001 onwards illustrates a slide from concern into tacit complicity. The Moscow 2001 Summit reaffirmed “democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law,” but its only Chechnya reference was the same hollow call for a “political solution”, while respecting sovereignty⁶³. Putin, in turn, portrayed Chechnya as Europe’s own problem: “religious extremists” comparable to Kosovo’s separatists, threatening to export “narcotics, prostitution and arms smuggling.”⁶⁴ He grossly manipulated the narrative, and Brussels complied. Helsinki-style ultimatums were long gone.

In fact, the Gothenburg European Council (2001) was the last to even mention Chechnya. Laeken (2001) instead celebrated intensified relations,⁶⁵ outlining a Common European Economic Area and “stepping up the energy dialogue.” Thessaloniki (2003) praised “concrete action plans” as proof of “a more solid and reciprocal form of collaboration.”⁶⁶ By March 2004, the Council congratulated “President Putin on his re-election” and looked forward to “building a strategic partnership [...] based on common values.”⁶⁷ The silence on Chechnya had by then become policy in itself — a striking case of how absence of language is itself a form of engagement.

The European Parliament initially resisted this drift. Its 2001 Human Rights Report warned of an “international blind spot,” accusing Western governments of abandoning values in the pursuit of expedient alliances and explicitly criticising Putin’s analogy between Chechnya and America’s war on al-Qaeda.⁶⁸ In 2002, the EP deplored the Council’s failure to raise Chechnya at EU–

⁶² European Commission, *EU/Russia Summit Joint Declaration*, IP/00/1239, October 30, 2000, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_00_1239

⁶³ European Commission. “Russia–European Union Summit (Moscow, 17 May 2001) Joint Statement.” Press Release PRES / 01 / 189, May 17, 2001. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/pres_01_189

⁶⁴ “Statement for the Press and Answers to Questions at a Press Conference after the Russia–European Union Summit,” press-conference transcript, Moscow, May 17, 2001, President of Russia (Kremlin), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21238>

⁶⁴ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions: Brussels European Council, 24–25 October 2002*. Brussels, 2002. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/bru021_en.pdf

⁶⁵ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions: Laeken European Council, 14–15 December 2001*. Brussels, 2001. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/lae_en.pdf

⁶⁶ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions: Thessaloniki European Council, 19–20 June 2003*. Brussels, 2003. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/the_en.pdf

⁶⁷ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions: Brussels European Council, 25–26 March 2004*. Brussels, 2004. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/bru0304_en.pdf

⁶⁸ European Parliament, *Annual Report on Human Rights in the World in 2001 and European Union Human Rights Policy*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-5-2002-0106_EN.html

Russia summits and called for international investigations into war crimes, warning that impunity risked becoming institutionalised.⁶⁹

Yet even Parliament's critical edge dulled over time. By 2003, it confined itself to noting an ad hoc delegation to "help improve specific human rights situations" without pressing Russia's accountability⁷⁰. In 2004, it denounced "extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture in custody in Chechnya"⁷¹ — but immediately paired this with recognition of Russia's territorial integrity and explicit support for its counter-terrorism narrative. In effect, the Parliament — once the loudest critic — began recycling Moscow's own vocabulary, portraying Russia not as perpetrator but as a state combating extremist threats. The very body that once accused Western governments of "abandoning their values" now mirrored the Kremlin's framing.

EU Objectives

Perhaps the most saddening finding from the DAR Index is the persistence of the "shared integration pathway". Across both EUCO conclusions and CFSP reports, from 2000 to 2004, the EU described its relationship with Russia using unbroken language of "strategic partnership" (mentioned 21 times), "shared values"⁷², and deepening relations through four common spaces. In 2000, the *EU–Russia Summit Joint Declaration* (October 2000)⁷³ celebrated Russia's "internal reforms," pledged support for "rule of law" and "modernisation," and launched ambitious new security consultations. This declaration systematised what would become the dominant approach: advancing institutional partnership with Moscow regardless of its behaviour in Chechnya.

The 2002 October Brussels and 2003 Thessaloniki Council conclusions offered no distancing either; the EU reinforced its cooperative discourse using the Four Common Spaces blueprint to frame Russia as central to Europe's future.

By 2003, the EU was celebrating 300 years since the foundation of St Petersburg, coinciding with the Russia-EU summit as well. After the summit, European Commission President Romano Prodi declared: "We have a very strong partnership. [...] I told Vladimir that now we are like vodka and caviar. I don't know which is which. But it's clear each side's trade, investment, common views and consultation is increasing."⁷⁴ This means that by then, the EU publicly celebrated and showed willingness to further deepen a relationship with the state that was accused of numerous war crimes in Chechnya. And a year later, 2004 CFSP Annual

⁶⁹ European Parliament, *Annual Report on Human Rights in the World in 2002 and European Union Human Rights Policy*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-5-2003-0274_EN.html

⁷⁰ European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs. *Report on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2003 and the EU's Policy on the Matter*, Rapporteur Véronique De Keyser, A5-0270/2004 (2004) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-5-2004-0270_EN.html

⁷¹ European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs. *Report on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2004 and the EU's Policy on the Matter*, rapporteur Simon Coveney, A6-0086/2005 (2005), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-6-2005-0086_EN.html

⁷² Göteborg European Council, 15–16 June 2001

⁷³ European Commission, *EU–Russia Summit: A New Momentum for Relations*, press release IP/00/1239, October 30, 2000, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_00_1239

⁷⁴ Maura Reynolds and David Holley, "Bush Asks Europe to Move Past Rivalry," *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 2003, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jun-01-fg-bush1-story.html>

Report “reaffirmed [EU’s] determination to build a genuine strategic partnership with Russia based on equal rights and obligations.”⁷⁵

What this indicator ultimately reveals is that the EU’s long-term objective during the Second Chechen War was not formed by Russia’s conduct, but by the EU’s own determination to maintain and further deepen the engagement. The Union invested in a future-oriented vision of Russia as a reformable and cooperative partner, even as empirical evidence contradicted that assumption.

Instruments Used

Instruments are the clearest litmus test for whether EU rhetoric translates into real-world pressure. During the Second Chechen War, they reveal an interesting pattern: the EU kept the financial aid flowing, expanded institutional links, and offered Russia not less but more, in the face of escalating violence.

1999 was again the exception. The EU re-routed TACIS assistance away from certain Russian sectors and suspended elements of the PCA. However, by early 2000, this assertiveness had been rolled back. CFSP reports and European Council conclusions reveal that the EU not only resumed technical assistance but increased it — including €6 million in support for chemical weapons disarmament⁷⁶.

From 2001 onward, the EU consistently allocated millions in assistance: additional €6.1 million in 2001 alone for non-proliferation and arms control⁷⁷, €5.5 million for different projects in 2003⁷⁸. These transfers continued even after the OSCE Assistance Group was expelled from Chechnya. No recalibrations followed. No new conditions were attached. Even worse, EU institutional machinery actually deepened: the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was extended; four new “Common Spaces” were negotiated; and the Permanent Partnership Council was inaugurated.

Unfortunately, as Russia dismantled civil society, tightened information control, and consolidated authoritarian power under Putin, the EU was busy building more avenues for “strategic partnership.”

Conclusion: A War That Didn’t Change the Story

⁷⁵ Council of the European Union, *2004 Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Main Aspects and Basic Choices of CFSP*, document 10255/1/04 REV 1, June 16, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20250316072901/https://aei.pitt.edu/43162/1/CFSP_2004.pdf.

⁷⁶ Council of the European Union. *Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Main Aspects and Basic Choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)*. Brussels, 2000. https://aei.pitt.edu/43158/1/CFSP_2000.pdf

⁷⁷ Council of the European Union. *Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Main Aspects and Basic Choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) — 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001*. Brussels, 2001. https://web.archive.org/web/20250323140400/https://aei.pitt.edu/43159/1/CFSP_2001.pdf

⁷⁸ Council of the European Union. *Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Main Aspects and Basic Choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) — 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003*. Brussels, 2003. https://web.archive.org/web/20240706194958/http://aei.pitt.edu/43161/1/CFSP_2003.pdf

In the end, Chechnya did not so much test the European Union’s vaunted “normative power” as expose its built-in escape hatches. Brussels began the war brandishing human-rights clauses; it finished it clinking glasses with the man who flattened Grozny because, despite mounting evidence of systemic violence and war crimes, the EU maintained its belief that Russia was a reformable partner.

Instead of asking *why* the Kremlin razed a city, Brussels invited it to co-draft terrorism action plans, turning Russia’s use of force into another “shared challenge” to be managed by dialogue. The EU believed it could integrate Russia out of aggression via “vodka and caviar” diplomacy. No documents across EUCO or CFSP ever cast doubt on Russia’s trajectory; the idea of Russia as a fundamentally different or hostile regime never appeared.

Quite the opposite, as a crisis complicated the strategic-partner script, the EU downgraded its response from outrage to concern, from concern to technicality, from technicality to silence, until the storyline was intact again. Developmentalism became the organising principle, the conviction that more trade, more dialogue would liberalise the Kremlin faster than any sanction. The motto was to integrate Russia first, litigate Chechnya later, or never...

In other words, the Union and more broadly, the international community, as Rachel Danber terms, was simply “glad to be deceived”⁷⁹.

4.4. DARI Profile: In-between war period (2005-2007)

Average DARI Score: 1.14

Policy Framing

The Council’s baseline in this “in-between war” window is unmistakably cooperative. In June 2005, EU leaders “express[ed] satisfaction” at the EU–Russia summit with “adoption of the road maps for the creation of four common spaces,” adding that implementation would “strengthen the strategic partnership” and regional cooperation.⁸⁰

After framing January 2006 gas crisis as an “energy crisis between Russia and Ukraine,”⁸¹ an object lesson for better “prevention and forward planning”, the first instance of the direct responsibility is seen in the 2006 CFSP report, which attributes the delay in launching a new agreement to “the ban by Russia on imports of meat products from Poland”⁸². It is one of the very few occurrences when Russia’s actions have had consequences in the EU-Russia relationship development. Although, the overall relationship was still marked by “positive dynamic and momentum.”

⁷⁹ Rachel Denber, “ ‘Glad to Be Deceived’: The International Community and Chechnya,” in *World Report 2004* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k4/7.htm>

⁸⁰ European Council, *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 16 June 2005*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/bru0605_en.pdf

⁸¹ Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2005*. Brussels, 2006. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20240707074040/http://aei.pitt.edu/43163/1/CFSP_2005.pdf

⁸² Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2006*. Brussels, 2007. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20240707015744/http://aei.pitt.edu/43164/1/CFSP_2006.pdf

In 2007 it goes further, noting the EU “raised its voice against [...] the restrictions imposed by Russia on ODIHR, reducing its capacity to ensure independent and credible election monitoring.”⁸³ That’s as close as the CFSP text gets to explicit responsibility in this period. However, the very same pages boast about deepening cooperation, so the censure remains bounded.

The European Parliament supplies the missing part of the moral address and keeps it visible across 2006–2007. In 2006 it is “concerned that the new Russian NGO legislation will inhibit human rights organisations,” and asks the Council/Commission to raise “extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture in custody in Chechnya,” as well as attacks on defenders—i.e., unambiguous normative naming with a clear target.⁸⁴ In 2007 it is “appalled at the murder of Anna Politkovskaya,” and “is concerned about allegations that the Russian government is behind the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko”.⁸⁵ In 2008, it “regrets the lack of results” from the consultations and “deplores Russia’s unwillingness” to allow adequate ODIHR observation, “question[ing] the democratic credentials” of the 2007–08 elections⁸⁶. Although, this hardly changes the Council’s cooperative mindset.

EU Objectives

Even though the EU put some responsibility to Russia, its objectives toward a “strong strategic partnership” never faded away.

In particular, the European Council framed the roadmaps as shared objectives, a medium-term programme for cooperation, and a tool to “*strengthen the strategic partnership*.”⁸⁷ Tony Blair’s post-October 2005-summit remarks made the logic explicit: “We want to try to take the relationship [...] to a new, more intense and stronger level,” and “begin talks [...] on the successor agreement to the present Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.”⁸⁸

When energy disputes emerged in 2006, the EU’s instinct was still to manage the friction within a rules-based framework. Russia was also kept in the loop on broader security cooperation: the

⁸³ Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2007*. Brussels, 2008. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20230415005701/https://aei.pitt.edu/43165/1/CFSP_2007.pdf.

⁸⁴ European Parliament, *European Parliament Resolution on Human Rights and Democracy in the World and the European Union’s Human Rights Policy 2005* (2006/2062(INI)), June 20, 2006. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2006-0220_GA.html

⁸⁵ European Parliament, *REPORT on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2006 and the EU’s policy on the matter*, (2007/2020(INI)), April 10, 2007. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-6-2007-0128_EN.html

⁸⁶ European Parliament. *European Parliament Resolution of 8 May 2008 on Human Rights in the World 2007 and the European Union’s Policy on the Matter* (2007/2274(INI)), May 8, 2008. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2008-0193_EN.html

⁸⁷ European Council, *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 16 June 2005*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/bru0605_en.pdf

⁸⁸ *Joint Press Conference with British Prime Minister Anthony Blair, President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and European Union High representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana Following the Russian-EU Summit*, Kremlin.ru: October 4, 2005, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23194>

“Vienna Declaration on Security Partnership,” possible tripartite JHA work with the U.S., and P5+1 diplomacy on Iran, which the Council “welcom[ed]” and “full[y] support[ed].”⁸⁹

By year’s end the CFSP (2006) report was explicit: the four spaces “have produced visible results,” negotiations on a “comprehensive and durable framework” should start “as soon as possible” in 2007, and sectoral cooperation proliferates. In 2007, this logic went global. The Council put Russia on a short list of “major partners” with whom to “deepen relations,” and “insist[ed] on the need for a global and comprehensive post-2012 [climate] agreement”. Visa facilitation and readmission entered into force, a visa-free dialogue was launched, and—tellingly—the response to recurrent energy shocks was a joint “early warning mechanism”.

The CFSP texts kept listing dense sectoral cooperation in 2006-07, in particular, WMD non-proliferation, crisis management, terrorism, and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, alongside active EU diplomacy in the common neighbourhood. The security objective was thus co-security: build security *with* Russia, not deterrent walls *against* it.

Tone and engagement

Across these three years the EU spoke to Moscow in a warm, relentlessly process-oriented manner. The EU clearly aimed at deepening the “strategic partnership” with Russia, one of the manifestations of which was Jean-Claude Juncker’s opening speech at the joint press event following the Moscow summit of 2005 May. He marked a special occasion of 60 years since the end of the WWII with the long remembrance of the Red Army’s role in “liberating Europe”.⁹⁰ He deliberately underlined this shared history, which was a tone-setter, aimed to please the Russian side.

In 2006, when Europe might have sharpened its voice after the January gas crisis, the Council did the opposite linguistically. During the Sochi summit press conference in the spring, Austria’s Wolfgang Schüssel said that “buying and selling oil and gas is a purely commercial activity; it is not politics,”⁹¹ lauding Russia as a “stable and reliable partner.” It was depoliticisation by design, “business-as-usual” – a transactional point of view, reiteration of Russian narrative, which lowered the rhetorical ceiling for any future confrontation.

The Helsinki summit⁹² served as an interesting instance of a change in tone. At the press conference, the Finnish Prime Minister voiced concern over human rights and, in particular, the investigation into Politkovskaya’s killing. To this end, Putin’s remark was characterised with classic whataboutism; he counter-raised the “strange status” of Russian-speakers in the Baltics

⁸⁹ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 15–16 June 2006*. Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2006. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/bru062006_en.pdf

⁹⁰ Press Statement and Responses to Questions Following the Russia-European Union Summit. Kremlin.ru: May 10, 2005, Moscow, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22967>

⁹¹ Press Conference following Russia-EU Summit, Kremlin.ru: May 25, 2006, Sochi, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23595>

⁹² Joint Press Conference with the Prime Minister of Finland Matti Vanhanen, President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso, Secretary General of the EU Council and EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, Prime Minister of Norway Jens Stoltenberg and Prime Minister of Iceland Geir Haarde following the Russia-EU summit meeting, Kremlin.ru: November 24, 2006, Helsinki, <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23921>

and urging that Europe “remember... political crimes in other countries”. As a result of this meeting, the parties failed to renew negotiations on a new agreement, although, the reason was not tied to the human rights, but it was primarily because of an internal EU veto over Russia’s ban on Polish meat imports. Unfortunately, even at a moment of acute political and rights-based tension, trade disputes dictated the agenda more than the EU’s stated values.

Instruments used

Between 2005 and 2007 the EU’s toolbox pointed to embedding, funding, and multiplying channels with Russia. In 2005, on top of the roadmaps, the finances moved toward engagement: a €20 m programme for the North Caucasus and ongoing WMD-related cooperation⁹³.

In addition, in response to the 2006 gas disputes, the European Council March conclusions called for a “*more effective*”, “*revitalised*” Energy Dialogue with Russia, underlined “*mutual interdependence*,” and reciprocal market access — right down to “*non-discriminatory third-party access to pipelines in Russia*.”⁹⁴ By June, this became part of a broader external energy policy: [1] conclude the Energy Charter Transit Protocol and secure ratification of the Energy Charter Treaty; [2] agree on energy provisions within the PCA’s successor framework.⁹⁵

By 2007, instruments became more diverse. Mobility commitments matured into delivery of the results: the visa-facilitation and readmission agreements entered into force and a visa-free dialogue opened in December⁹⁶. On energy, the year’s concrete innovation was the early warning mechanism for supply disruptions—first agreed in principle at *Samara* summit and then carried forward. At the same time, the EU adopted a Joint Action that funded Russia’s destruction of chemical weapons at Shchuch’ye, in particular, €3.145 m to finish the electricity infrastructure feeding the facility. And the December 2007 European Council included Russia into a roster of strategic summits and “strengthen[ed] common ground,” reinforcing the normalisation of these tools.⁹⁷

The Council’s tools continued to operate firmly within a cooperative framework. In practical terms, the answer to “do the EU’s words translate into action?” is yes, but the action taken is integrationist. Money is allocated, legal and technical channels are expanded, and new formats emerge. What is absent are suspensions, cuts in aid, or conditionality tied to human rights. The EU’s actions reflect its conviction that, in 2005–2007, the best way to deal with Russia is to bind it in, not bind it down.

Underlying Logic

⁹³ Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2005*. Brussels, 2006. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20240707074040/http://aei.pitt.edu/43163/1/CFSP_2005.pdf

⁹⁴ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 23–24 March 2006*. Brussels, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/bru032006_en.pdf

⁹⁵ European Council, *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 15–16 June 2006*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/pdf/bru062006_en.pdf

⁹⁶ Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2007*. Brussels, 2008. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20230415005701/https://aei.pitt.edu/43165/1/CFSP_2007.pdf

⁹⁷ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 14 December 2007*. Brussels. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16616-2007-INIT/en/pdf>

From 2005 to 2007, the EU's underlying logic remains firmly developmentalist. The road maps for the four Common Spaces (2005) are manifestations of this attitude: the EU treats them as blueprints for gradual alignment with the assumption being that deepening ties will, over time, encourage behavioural change.

Both the European Council and the CFSP Annual Reports during this period are saturated with language of *joint ownership*, *mutual benefit*, and *shared spaces*. Energy security is pursued through integrationist instruments; there are no hints pertaining to diversification *away* from Russian supply. Even after gas disputes, the perception is to “revitalise the dialogue” rather than recalibrate dependency.

The Helsinki summit in November 2006 is a relative outlier in this trend. Litvinenko's poisoning and Politkovskaya's murder prompted the human rights issues to surface more explicitly. In fact, the latter was also the first time since 2001 that Chechnya (not “issues connected to North-Caucasus”) re-entered official EU discourse. Tellingly, this was not related to a reassessment of the war itself, but it was a by-product of international outrage over the killing of one of its most prominent critics. It reflects a broader pattern in which the EU seems to take the shock of high-profile murders or fresh outbreaks of violence for it to “remember” wars and crises it had allowed to fade from its discourse. Therefore, this reappearance was more of a reactive acknowledgement, which soon subsumed under the broader partnership narrative.

4.5. DARI Profile: Russo-Georgian War 2008

Average DARI Score: 2.21

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War was the EU's most serious geopolitical test with Russia before 2014 — and it exposed the limits of its willingness to confront a strategic partner. The September European Council's unusually sharp condemnation masked an embedded concession: adopting Moscow's “reaction” framing, which shifted blame toward Georgia. What followed was a rapid reversion to cooperative rhetoric, narrowly defined conditionality, and a preservation of trade and institutional ties. The average DARI score of 2.21 captures this pattern of short-lived escalation giving way to the EU's developmentalist instinct to maintain the partnership track.

Policy Framing

At first glance, the September 2008 European Council looks as one of the rare moments in pre-2014 EU–Russia discourse where the language spiked into visible confrontation. The EUCO declared the “*disproportionate reaction of Russia*” to be “*unacceptable*”, condemned Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and demanded troop withdrawal “*without delay*”.⁹⁸ In isolation, this sounded like the language of a bloc that was willing to draw a red line.

Although, the Council's very same sentence that was critical of Russia, also quietly (although purposefully) undercut this viewpoint. It termed Russia's role as a “*reaction*” to events in Georgia, which mirrored the Kremlin's central falsehood that Tbilisi initiated hostilities, and

⁹⁸ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions, Extraordinary European Council, 1 September 2008*. Brussels, 1 September 2008. Document ST 12594 08. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12594-2008-INIT/en/pdf>.

Russia was a mere peacekeeper, forced to enter the conflict in order to defend the Russian speaking population. Using this term was not accidental; in the post-summit remarks on 8 September, President Nicolas Sarkozy publicly made his point explicit: “If we are talking about a *reaction*, that obviously means that there has been *some kind of action*. The meaning of these words is perfectly clear. And I believe that we have responded in a balanced manner.”⁹⁹ This public endorsement of Russia’s narrative: “action” by Georgia, “reaction” by Russia, effectively legitimised Moscow’s version of events, diluting the force of the EU’s own condemnation.

By October, even the existing relatively sharp discourse dissipated. The follow-up EUCO “*noted with satisfaction*”¹⁰⁰ Russia’s withdrawal from adjacent zones of the occupied territories, offered no moral language, and moved directly back to preparing for the November Nice Summit 2008. In doing so, the EU recast the August war as a closed procedural matter, one that could be addressed, filed and moved past.

The CFSP 2008 text¹⁰¹ further proved this reframing: it did reference the condemnation that was present in September’s EUCO meeting, but it framed the war in technical terms, it primarily celebrated the EU’s role as a mediator and described the incident as a test of EU crisis-management capacity. Nowhere did the report position Russia as the aggressor; instead, the “reaction” framing persisted.

The European Parliament, however, refused to smooth over the narrative. In its 2009 resolution¹⁰², it labelled Russia an “*occupying power in Georgia*” and demanded that Moscow “*uphold human rights in Abkhazia and South Ossetia*”, permit international monitors, and enable the return of displaced persons. Unlike EUCO and CFSP outputs, the EP’s wording was direct towards Russia’s conduct and its legal obligations.

EU Objectives

The September 2008 EUCO framed the EU–Russia relationship in conditional terms: Moscow was “at a crossroads,” and the suspension of Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiations would remain until troop withdrawal was complete.

Although notably this condition was narrow: “the troop withdrawal” referred not to the occupied territories but the zones adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In effect, the EU was showcasing that the core territorial seizures were not up for immediate contestation.

The follow-up messaging underlined that the reaction was never meant to reset the EU-Russia relationship fundamentals - the EU stopped short of suggesting that the relationship might be altered for good. Sarkozy himself made this explicit: “I see no reason that the meeting between

⁹⁹ Press Conference following Talks with President of France Nicolas Sarkozy,” September 8, 2008. Translated transcript. Moscow: Kremlin.ru. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1330>

¹⁰⁰ European Council, *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 15 and 16 October 2008*, Brussels, 16 October 2008, Document ST 14368/08, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14368-2008-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁰¹ Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2008*. Brussels, 2009. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20250317212525/https://aei.pitt.edu/43166/1/CFSP_2008.pdf

¹⁰² European Parliament. *Resolution of 7 May 2009 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World 2008 and the European Union’s Policy on the Matter*, *Official Journal of the European Union* C 212 E, May 5, 2010, 60–81, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:212E:0060:0081:EN:PDF>

Russia and Europe that was postponed in September should not be held in October. All this is perfectly clear. We want partnership, we want peace, and no one needs a confrontation between Europe and Russia.”¹⁰³

This was hardly the language of a bloc that was planning for policy realignment; it was damage containment, aimed at restoring the partnership track as quickly as possible. By November, the suspension had been effectively lifted in practice, and by year’s end the CFSP explicitly reaffirmed that “*we need Russia as a reliable partner*”.¹⁰⁴

This came in parallel to Dmitri Medvedev’s post-Nice Summit remarks in November, where he said: “The four common spaces remain in place... we have the opportunity to get things fully moving again now.”¹⁰⁵ This fully coincided with the EU’s assessment of the relationship, in particular, that Russia’s integration with the EU had effectively survived the war intact.

Tone of Engagement

The September Council conclusions can be assessed as sharp, it used the terms: “*strongly condemns*”, “*must... withdraw*”, “*unacceptable*”.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, this “assertive conditionality” lasted barely a month.

The November Nice summit made that reversion unmistakable. Standing beside Dmitry Medvedev, President Nicolas Sarkozy spent little time challenging Russia over its war in Georgia. Instead, both leaders chose to speak the language of the future or, more precisely, Russia’s preferred future. Medvedev reframed the war as “the consequences of Georgia’s aggression in South Ossetia,”¹⁰⁷ and Sarkozy did not contest this framing. Instead, he appeared much more willing to look ahead and speculate that the conflict could prompt changes within the existing pan-European security arrangements. Furthermore, he backed his Russian counterpart’s “proposal for a new European “security architecture”.¹⁰⁸

Additionally, Sarkozy also revisited his idea of creating a fully shared “economic space” between Russia and the EU, on which he first talked about in September: “I remain convinced that we all -- the Russian Federation and Europe -- have an interest in working toward a common economic

¹⁰³ Press Conference following Talks with President of France Nicolas Sarkozy, September 8, 2008. Moscow: Kremlin.ru. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1330>

¹⁰⁴ Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2008*. Brussels, 2009. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20250317212525/https://aei.pitt.edu/43166/1/CFSP_2008.pdf

¹⁰⁵ Statement and Answers to Journalists’ Questions after the 22 Russia–EU Summit, November 14, 2008, Nice: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/2082>

¹⁰⁶ European Council. *Presidency Conclusions, Extraordinary European Council, 1 September 2008*. Brussels, 1 September 2008. Document ST 12594 08. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12594-2008-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁰⁷Statement and Answers to Journalists’ Questions after the 22 Russia–EU Summit, November 14, 2008, Nice: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/2082>

¹⁰⁸ Ahto Lobjakas, “EU-Russia Summit Hints at Geopolitical Rapprochement,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 14, 2008, https://www.rferl.org/a/EURussia_Summit_Hints_At_Geopolitical_Rapprochement/1349273.html

space, which would allow the creation of interdependencies, and would definitively rule out all forms of confrontation -- because they would undermine common interests," Sarkozy said.¹⁰⁹

Medvedev seized the moment to cast the European position as “quite balanced” especially compared to a “much more exotic perspective – one could even call it extremist – that involved a demand for some sort of *strange* sanctions and other actions against Russia.” He evaluated this to be “unproductive, pointless and not in the best interests of the European Union.” It was a subtle step from Moscow: they framed moderation like statesmanship, whereas tougher measures were painted as irrational.

The year’s CFSP report¹¹⁰ remained the same critical-but-cordial tone, which was quite paradoxical. It mentioned to “shook some of the foundations of a reliable partnership”, while in the following sentence, Moscow was referred to as “a key partner”. It did not shy away from naming disputes: it “strongly condemned Russia’s unilateral decision to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia”, because it supported “the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia”. Although, a great deal of emphasis was made on EU-Russia cooperation, and for this reason the EU’s policy was set to be “both principled and rational” which, stripped of its diplomatic varnish, was less a balance between partners than an exercise in appeasing the aggressor.

Instruments Used

The Council’s most tangible lever in September 2008 was suspension pertaining to the renewal of EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiations. These talks had been launched only months earlier at the June EU-Russia summit in Khanty-Mansiisk and pausing them was framed as a direct response to Russia’s continued military presence in Georgia. In other words, it was conditionality tied to a distinct demand – troop withdrawal. Nevertheless, its durability was minimal. On 10 November, barely two months later, it was decided to resume these negotiations following the “in-depth examination of the various aspects of the EU-Russia relations”¹¹¹. The official justification read the following: “These negotiations should continue, first because this would allow the EU to pursue its own interests with Russia, and secondly because this is the best way to engage with Russia on the basis of a unified position.”¹¹² Hence, this was not a hardening of stance; because the freeze was so short-lived and entirely reversible, this was cooling phase conditionality aimed as being a symbolic pause that allowed the EU to show its disapproval without altering its relationship with Russia. For Moscow, it became evident that the EU’s strongest “penalty” was designed to be only temporary, and contingent upon procedural concessions.

As for the financial instruments, direct aid to Russia was untouched. Instead, adjustments were indirect: funds and political attention were re-routed to Georgia. The EU deployed the European

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Council of the European Union, *CFSP Annual Report 2008*. Brussels, 2009. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20250317212525/https://aei.pitt.edu/43166/1/CFSP_2008.pdf

¹¹¹ European Commission. *EU–Russia Relations: The EU–Russia Summit in Nice on 14 November 2008*. MEMO/08/678, November 13, 2008. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/memo_08_678

¹¹² Ibid

Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to oversee the post-conflict security environment and convened a donors' conference that mobilised substantial pledges for Georgia's reconstruction. These moves reinforced the EU's role as a crisis stabiliser, but they avoided punitive economic measures against Russia.

Trade relations, which was arguably the most potent lever at the EU's disposal remained untouched. On the contrary, official discourse underscored economic interdependence, noting that Russia was the EU's "third most important trading partner" and that bilateral trade had been growing at an annual rate of around 20%.¹¹³ Such framing elevated trade from a neutral fact to a justification for restraint. Economic interdependence was treated less as a source of bargaining power and more as an asset to be preserved, it was explicitly "shielded" from politicisation.

Underlying Logic and Conclusion

Russo–Georgian War elicited a rare occasion of EU's confrontational rhetoric, but the episode is equally defined by how quickly the EU moved to restore normalcy. The Council's September depiction of the crisis as a "crossroads" for Russia was a textbook expression of the EU's developmentalist worldview. September's hard-edged language and procedural freeze on PCA talks gave way, within weeks, to a tone of cooperative satisfaction and resumed institutional engagement.

As a result, sanctions stayed off the table, economic ties stayed sacred, and Moscow learned that European fury has a short shelf life. Moderation was rebranded as balance; toughness, dismissed as "extremism" - all of this makes 2008 less a turning point in the erosion of developmentalism than a case study in its resilience, even when Russia used force in the EU's immediate neighbourhood.

4.6. DARI Profile: Interwar period (2009-2013)¹¹⁴

Average DARI Score: 2.12

The years 2009-2013 form an insightful part in the EU's attitudes toward Russia; five years during which the Council's discourse transformed from confident optimism of "modernisation" and shared objectives to a harder, conditional tone that openly challenged coercive Russian conduct. Nevertheless, as criticism emerged, the EU's fundamental rationality stayed deeply ensconced in developmentalism.

Policy Framing

The way the EU framed its relationship with Russia between 2009 and 2013 reveals a gradual but undeniable hardening of tone. In 2009, the CFSP report still described the EU and Russia as

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ **Disclaimer on Sources**

This scoring relies exclusively on the **CFSP annual reports** as the primary text base. The European Council conclusions for 2009–2013 either made no reference to Russia or referred to it only in broad, generic terms (e.g., global economic issues, multilateral coordination). Such mentions did not materially alter the framing or would not have changed the assessment. For this reason, the EUCO conclusions were not factored into the scoring.

“strategic partners” bound by “shared interests” and united in the belief that a new Agreement would “provide a comprehensive framework for EU-Russia relations for the foreseeable future.”¹¹⁵ One of the additional manifestations of this friendly attitude was May 2009 EU-Russia summit, where Commission President José Manuel Barroso set the tone of the period with a language of *positive interdependence*: “We work in the spirit of positive interdependence [...] Russia [is] an indispensable partner of the European Union [...] Let’s apply this spirit and develop all the untapped potential of our relationship.”¹¹⁶ A year later, President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy further elaborated on the same matter, although he connected this partnership to Russia’s modernisation, which was one of the most popular topics of conversation, initiated by President Medvedev within the EU-Russia bilateral relations. He stated that the EU [want[ed] to be Russia’s partner in modernization]”.¹¹⁷

In terms of attribution of responsibility, the Council remained deliberately vague. In the wake of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the 2009 CFSP report referred to “Russia’s non-compliance of the 12 August and 8 September 2008 agreements” without directly framing this as part of Russia’s broader pattern. Furthermore, the 2010 report emphasised ongoing cooperation on “protracted conflicts in the common neighbourhood”, which served as a formulation of diffused agency of Russia as a perpetrator; instead, it was put as a common concern.¹¹⁸

The 2013 CFSP report was the first time when the Council accused Russia of putting “mounting pressure” on Eastern Partnership states and “infring[ing] on the fundamental sovereign right of states to freely determine their foreign and trade policy.”¹¹⁹ The mere language of “concern” was turned into portraying Russia as an actor obstructing the EU’s core neighbourhood policy. Even so, the blame was framed in terms of specific, separate episodes, rather than as part of a systemic doctrine of aggression.

EU Objectives

While some aspects of the EU’s attitudes undertook partial transformation over the course of 2009-2013, the vision of the future relationship with Russia remained almost untouched. Even at moments of heightened criticism, the reports maintained optimistic.

In the 2009 report, Russia was regarded as a “key partner” of the European Union. The 2010 CFSP report also underlined the importance of partnership, but in this case it formulated EU’s commitment “to building a strong, *modernised* relationship with Russia.” Herman Von Rompuy

¹¹⁵ Council of the European Union, CFSP Annual Report 2009. Brussels, 2010. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20240705101650/http://aei.pitt.edu/43167/1/CFSP_2009.pdf

¹¹⁶ News Conference following Russia–EU Summit, Khabarovsk, 22 May 2009, Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/4172>.

¹¹⁷ News Conference following EU-Russia Summit, Rostov-on-Don, 1 June 2010, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/7932>

¹¹⁸ Council of the European Union, CFSP Annual Report 2010. Brussels, 2011. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20240706152231/http://aei.pitt.edu/43168/1/CFSP_2010.pdf

¹¹⁹ Council of the European Union, CFSP Annual Report 2013. Brussels, 2014. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/st_12094_2014_init_en.pdf

further reinforced this sentiment in a memorable line: “With Russia we do not need a ‘reset’. We want a ‘fast forward’.”¹²⁰

In terms of security, the EU saw this development via cooperation: “The European Union and Russia share a common interest in improving the security, stability, and prosperity in our common neighbourhoods... we would like to see a more constructive role... including implementation... with regard to Georgia.”¹²¹ And in December 2010, President of the European Council is even clearer: “Progress in this field [Russo-Georgian war] will create momentum for EU-Russia cooperation in general.”¹²² He keeps the solution-space cooperative, even when invoking “territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia,” yet it reads as an appeal and “strong encouragement”.

The EU did not seem to mention the human-rights issue pertaining to the Russo-Georgian war. Although, in 2011 human rights dialogues were maintained and explicit criticisms issued for example, concerning the “procedural violations” of electoral standards and “the situation in the Northern Caucasus”.¹²³ However, these developments were consistently in parallel with steps to advance visa liberalisation, trade integration, and sectoral cooperation.

The 2013 CFSP still carried those integration objectives (new agreement, visa track, global issue-sharing), but the “Looking ahead 2014” section hard-wired a condition that had not been there before: “Relations with Russia will remain challenging... It will not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea. Progress towards solution of the Ukraine crisis will remain a prerequisite to re-engagement in the many areas of shared interest such as re-launch of negotiations on a New Agreement, visa dialogue and implementation of ‘common steps’ towards possible visa liberalisation.”¹²⁴ In other words, the EU kept those objectives but for the first time it said: *not until behaviour changes*.

Tone and Vocabulary

The evolution of tone of engagement was the most vivid in the way the Council chose to construct its discourse. In particular, it is an interesting transformation of what came first, what was emphasised, and what was left implicit.

In the early years, particularly 2009 and 2010, the Council’s phrasing was weighted toward reassurance. Typical constructions took the form of “*while challenges remain, both sides remain committed to the strategic partnership*.” The construction of the sentences always placed the weight on the positive: difficulties were framed as temporary obstacles along the path of a larger, cooperative project. For instance, in 2009, the effects of Russo-Georgian war were softened into

¹²⁰ News Conference following EU-Russia Summit, Rostov-on-Don, 1 June 2010, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/7932>

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Press statements following EU-Russia Summit, 7 December 2010, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/9730>

¹²³ Council of the European Union, CFSP Annual Report 2011. Brussels, 2012. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://web.archive.org/web/20250325131144/https://aei.pitt.edu/43169/1/CFSP_2011.pdf

¹²⁴ Council of the European Union, CFSP Annual Report 2013. Brussels, 2014. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/st_12094_2014_init_en.pdf

terming the force projection as “the situation/crisis in Georgia” or describing it as “a setback” in the EU-Russia relationship dynamic. Similarly, Russia’s human rights issues were mentioned, but the reports quickly moved to stress “constructive cooperation” in areas like counterterrorism or peacekeeping. In December’s EU-Russia summit 2010, this optimism was made explicit by the EU’s high-level officials: “The EU and Russia are *real* strategic partners... The direction of our relations is towards more convergence. The political will is really present to go ahead with modernisation in all fields of society.”

The 2011 CFSP report preserved the upbeat vocabulary of “constructive atmosphere” and “achievements,” but criticisms were not mild anymore. The Council spoke of “limited concrete deliverables” at summits, “instability” in Russia’s domestic situation, and Russia’s failure to implement the agreement on Siberian overflight royalties. Tone here was restrained but slightly less forgiving: Russia was still framed as a partner, but a partner falling short of agreed standards. Nevertheless, in June 2012, the President of the European Council still characterised the bilateral relationship, as having the “best dynamics for years.”¹²⁵

The decisive shift in tone happened in 2013, where positive developments were reported only factually, while negatives were spelled out in strikingly sharper language. For the first time, the Council accused Russia of having “failed to live up” to commitments, “remained in non-compliance with its obligations” on Georgia, and being the “main obstacle” to conflict resolution. In a nutshell, the EU no longer used “despite difficulties, cooperation deepened” form, but rather “despite some cooperation, problems persisted.”

Instruments Used

The EU’s preferred instruments were dialogue, joint platforms, and multilateral cooperation.

In the immediate aftermath of the Russo-Georgian war, the EU did not scale back its channels of engagement. On the contrary, 2009 was marked by intensification: *five rounds of negotiations* on the new EU–Russia Agreement, *35 political-dialogue meetings*, and Russia’s inclusion in wider frameworks such as ASEM. Crucially, no suspensions or conditionalities were imposed on the institutional tracks of the relationship, even though the reports acknowledged “Russia’s non-compliance” in Georgia and the “particularly serious implications” of energy disputes.

Similarly, in 2010 the Council reported “more than 30 formal political dialogue meetings at different levels,” five further rounds of Agreement negotiations, and the *formal launch of the Partnership for Modernisation (PfM)* as a flagship initiative. Even as “limited deliverables” were noted, 2011 continued the engagement logic. Two summits were held, the PfM advanced, WTO accession talks neared completion, and the EU and Russia agreed on “Common Steps” toward visa liberalisation. Negotiations on the new Agreement did not falter either.

By 2012, engagement remained intensive: two summits, multiple sectoral dialogues (migration, energy, counter-terrorism), and the launch of PfM work plans. WTO integration was finalised;

¹²⁵ *Joint news conference following Russia-EU summit*, 4 June 2012, St Petersburg, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/15541>

energy cooperation deepened with Nord Stream and South Stream projects.¹²⁶ Only in 2013 did the picture begin to tilt toward defensive instruments. The Council authorised a WTO dispute settlement panel over Russian trade practices and, for the first time, stated explicitly the “need to diversify the sources of [EU’s] energy supplies”. This was a clear sign of a reevaluation.

Underlying logic and Conclusion

In interpreting Russian coercion, the EU during 2009–2012 treated force projection as episodic and normalised. The Georgian ceasefire violations, the 2009 gas crisis, and pressures on Eastern Partnership states were acknowledged, but were not contextualised as a deliberate policy of destabilisation. Normative labelling scores rose, attribution of responsibility became more precise, and conditionality began to creep into the vision of the relationship. Nevertheless, at no point did the EU abandon its partnership framing, downgrade Russia to an adversary, or shift decisively from “security with” to “security against.” In other words, Russia was never framed as an irredeemable challenger and the logic was that cooperation itself was the corrective. By 2013, the discourse edged closer to recognising a pattern, especially in the linkage between trade coercion and foreign policy pressure, but it stopped short of framing this as a long-term geopolitical strategy, a leap that would only occur post-Crimea.

4.7. DARI Profile: Russo-Ukrainian War 2014

Average DARI Score: 3.75

The year 2014 is the hinge on which a decade of European security turned. Between the occupation and annexation of Crimea in March, followed by war in Eastern parts of Ukraine, the European Union (EU) had to decide—quickly—what kind of actor it would be when a major power used force to redraw borders on the continent. This chapter traces how talk hardened into tools, how assistance evolved, how risk tolerance shifted, and how institutions were repurposed from routine cooperation to instruments of pressure. The primary point is to identify the pattern of EU behaviour that emerged under duress—and to characterise it with precision.

Policy Framing and Tone

Under the background of the recent annexation of Crimea, the March European Council conclusions was interesting in its policy framing.¹²⁷ Leaders “strongly condemned the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol” and, in the same breath, refused recognition of the territories as part of Russia. In one place the text denounced the annexation *to* the Russian Federation, which put the emphasis on the outcome of the fact (without ascribing the responsibility to the wrongdoer). The same document did state that “Russian actions breached the Helsinki process”, nevertheless, the attribution of responsibility on Russia’s act was kept deliberately vague.

¹²⁶ Council of the European Union, CFSP Annual Report 2012. Brussels, 2013. Archived at the Wayback Machine by AEI, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/st14924_en.pdf

¹²⁷ European Council. *European Council Conclusions, 20–21 March 2014 (EUCO 7/1/14 Rev. 1)*. Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 2014. ST 7/1/14 Rev 1. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7-2014-REV-1/en/pdf>

By June, the Council's voice changed from outrage to enforceable plan. The Council "expects by 30 June the following steps to be taken": agreement on a verification mechanism under the OSCE, the return of named border checkpoints to Ukraine, the release of hostages (including OSCE observers), and the launch of substantial talks of Poroshenko's peace plan¹²⁸. This is the EU's so-called "if/then directive" in its purest form: observable steps, a deadline, and the promise to act if unmet. The tone became prosecutorial - meaning, Russia was no longer being taught norms, it was being tried against them.

However, the paradox is that this prosecutorial stance still coexisted with hedging. In particular, June¹²⁹ and October¹³⁰ European Council conclusions reverted to softer attribution of responsibility pertaining to Russia's actions in Eastern Ukraine. The EU wanted to denounce aggression without foreclosing the discursive space for Russian cooperation in ceasefire management and therefore, urged Russia to "use its influence" over separatists as if it were a civil war, with Russia being a third party.

Although, in August, the Council condemns "aggression by Russian armed forces on Ukrainian soil" and "calls upon the Russian Federation to immediately withdraw all its military assets and forces from Ukraine"¹³¹. It tasks the Commission and the EEAS to table new measures within a week, including a legal basis to list any person or institution "dealing with" separatist groups.

By October, with the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum on the table, the EU pivots from calling out to calling to account. It refuses to recognise "presidential" and "parliamentary" votes announced by self-appointed authorities, insists any elections occur under Ukrainian law. Minsk is interpreted as a measurement tool; a test of intent and compliance. The logic is consistent with June's if/then framing: the Council defines what compliance looks like, who must enable it, and how it will be verified.

EU Objectives and Instruments

Sanctions begin to move from possibility to practice from March 2014, in particular, visa bans and asset freezes, with "far-reaching consequences" trailed if escalation continues; the next EU–Russia summit, and subsequently EU-Russia bilaterals, in general, are cancelled. This makes the January 2014 EU-Russia summit the last - 32nd bilateral meeting, where the EU speaks about "advanc[ing] further [the] strategic partnership".¹³²

¹²⁸ European Council. *European Council Conclusions, 26/27 June 2014 (EUCO 79/14)*. Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 2014. ST 79/14. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-79-2014-INIT/en/pdf>

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ European Council. *European Council Conclusions, 23/24 October 2014 (EUCO 169/14)*. Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 2014. ST 169/14. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-169-2014-INIT/en/pdf>

¹³¹ European Council. *European Council Conclusions, 30 August 2014 (EUCO 163/14)*. Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 2014. ST 163/14. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-163-2014-INIT/en/pdf>

¹³² European Council. *Remarks by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy following the 32nd EU-Russia Summit in Brussels* (press release, Brussels, 28 January 2014), EUCO 27/14; PRESSE 38; PR PCE 21, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23838/140834.pdf>

In June, non-recognition stops being abstract principle and becomes trade law: “import of goods from Crimea and Sevastopol” without Ukrainian certificates are prohibited. July delivers the consequences the June checklist outlined¹³³. The council expands the listings from people to entities, including those in Russia that materially or financially support the assault on Ukraine’s sovereignty. Crucially, the Council instructs the EIB to suspend new financing in Russia and coordinates positions at the EBRD to the same end; it also orders a re-assessment of EU–Russia cooperation programmes and prepares to restrict investment in Crimea. Nevertheless, even when the Union moves toward targeted suspension, some narrow lanes of cooperation stay open: trilateral talks on gas and technical consultations around the Association Agreement proceed; nevertheless, these can hardly be interpreted as gestures of normality but as ways to prevent wider collateral damage while pressure builds.

By December, the Council locks the year’s choices in. The non-recognition regime on Crimea and Sevastopol is tightened, the Council says it will “**stay the course,**” and macro-financial assistance to Kyiv continues (including a €500m tranche that month), with humanitarian channels scaled as needed.¹³⁴ The implication is EU’s clear commitment to sustained pressure: the EU will take further steps if the situation demands, but it already has a durable baseline to work from.

The CFSP Annual Report ties the narrative together.¹³⁵ It records an €11.1 billion support package for Ukraine over seven years, the EU-brokered winter gas deal that kept supplies flowing through March 2015, the launch of EUAM Ukraine aimed at reforming Ukraine’s civilian security sector, the spread of sectoral sanctions (capital markets, defence, dual-use, energy technologies), and the suspension of new EIB/EBRD financing in Russia. It also states the political bottom line that the year’s texts had already practised: “it cannot be business as usual” with Russia. Although, the claim was more declaratory than transformative: energy flows from Russia persisted, and trade in goods, though reduced by 26%, remained substantial at roughly €130 billion in 2015.¹³⁶ This said, targeted restrictive measures persisted and even increased throughout. By year-end, 132 individuals and 28 entities were listed, and the provisional set-up had hardened into policy.

Underlying logic of action

¹³³ European Council. *European Council Conclusions, 16 July 2014 (EUCO 147/14)*. Special meeting, Brussels, 16 July 2014. Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 2014. ST 147/14.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-147-2014-INIT/en/pdf>

¹³⁴ European Council. *European Council Conclusions, 18 December 2014 (EUCO 237/14)*. Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 2014. ST 237/14. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-237-2014-INIT/en/pdf>

¹³⁵ European Union, *Main Aspects and Basic Choices of the CFSP – 2014. Draft Annual Report from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament* (Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council, 20 July 2015), ST 11083/15, CFSP/PESC 435; COPS 245; FIN 527; PE 128, https://www.ecas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st_11083_2015_init_en.pdf

¹³⁶ Eurostat. “EU Trade with Russia – International Trade in Goods Statistics.” *Statistics Explained*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive%3ARussia-EU_-_International_trade_in_goods_statistics

Across 2014, the EU’s discourse positioned Russia in an uneasy middle ground: a systemic disruptor but not yet an irredeemable adversary. March already framed Moscow as a challenger to Europe’s legal order, but the door to dialogue remained ajar. By June, the framing softened into one of proxy management — Russia was cast less as an aggressor than as a state whose cooperation was needed to rein in separatists, almost as if the conflict were civil rather than interstate. The sharper language of July and August — especially “aggression by Russian armed forces on Ukrainian soil” — briefly edged towards recognising Russia as a direct belligerent, yet the texts still avoided calling this a doctrine or permanent trajectory. Instead, the Council fell back on describing Russia’s behaviour as patterned destabilisation: serious, sustained, and state-enabled, but not codified into an expansionist strategy. By the end of the year, and in the CFSP report, this posture hardened into a stable compromise: “cannot be business as usual” containment, balanced with selective cooperation. In DARI terms, Russia became an ambivalent actor locked into patterned aggression, dangerous enough to sanction but still treated as a counterpart in diplomacy.

4.8. DARI Profile: Interwar Period (2015-2021)

Average DARI Score: 3.73

Policy framing & tone

Throughout 2015–2021 the EU constructs Russia as the agent, breaching international law and Ukraine as the object of violated sovereignty. The baseline is set early: in March 2015 leaders “called on all parties to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements,” explicitly underlining “the Russian authorities’ responsibility,” and linked the duration of EU “restrictive measures” to the complete implementation of Minsk agreement (with the 31 December 2015 calendar marker). The same text reiterates “non-recognition” of the “illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol.”¹³⁷ It is interesting that the official EU vocabulary utilises the term “illegal” in the context of annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol 24 times in 15 documents over the course of these eight years.

By December 2018, the vocabulary becomes stronger. The European Council expresses “utmost concern” in regard to the developments around Kerch Strait, holds that there is “no justification for the use of military force by Russia,” and requests the “immediate release” of the sailors, return of “seized vessels,” and “free passage of all ships.” The EU also shows readiness to “adopt measures to strengthen further its support, in particular in favour of the affected areas of Ukraine.”¹³⁸

In June 2019, the European Council “reiterates its call on Russia to release the captured Ukrainian sailors unconditionally” and labels Russia’s “passportisation” in parts of Donetsk/Luhansk as running “counter to the spirit and the objectives of the Minsk

¹³⁷ European Council. European Council meeting (19 and 20 March 2015) – Conclusions. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

¹³⁸ European Council. European Council meeting (13 and 14 December 2018) – Conclusions. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-17-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

agreements.”¹³⁹ In other words, the EU’s tone and framing converge: the language is explicit about agency (Russia), norm (Minsk agreement & international law), and solution (complete Minsk agreement; release vessels/sailors; ensure free passage).

When the Navalny poisoning dominates the agenda (October 2020), the European Council “condemns” the attempted assassination with a “chemical nerve agent” and calls upon Russia to “fully cooperate” with the OPCW; it also returns to MH17, urging Russia to continue trilateral negotiations with Australia and the Netherlands.¹⁴⁰ During this time, the focus is almost entirely on the poisoning of Navalny, which had a huge impact on the perception change within the EU.

By December 2021, against Russia’s build-up, the Council warns that “any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe cost,”¹⁴¹ while reiterating full support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and encouraging diplomatic tracks (Normandy). The ask is now deterrent and unambiguous.

In the CFSP reports, this framing becomes doctrinal for the first time. In particular, Russia’s conduct is said to be a “violation of international law” that “challenge[s] the European security order at its core,” and EU policy is anchored in non-recognition and conditionality (Minsk).¹⁴² Repeated formulae—“illegal annexation,” “a security threat to all”¹⁴³, naming its actions as “provocative”, “disruptive”, “malign activities”¹⁴⁴ as well as repeated “calls on Russia to accept its responsibility”¹⁴⁵—demonstrate increasingly confrontational tone.

To sum up, the EU’s voice moves from rules-based admonition (2015) to high-intensity deterrent signalling (2021), while consistently assigning agency to Russia and keeping the legal frame at the centre.

EU objectives & instruments

a) Long-term vision and tolerance threshold

The EU’s stated end-state vis-à-vis Russia can be termed as conditional normalisation: any “substantial change” in the EU’s stance depends on full implementation of Minsk (2016–2021 CFSP). This is codified in the “five principles”, that was adopted by HR/VP Federica Mogherini in 2016. It includes: implementation of Minsk agreement; closer ties with Russia's former Soviet

¹³⁹ European Council. European Council meeting (20 June 2019) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁴⁰ European Council. Special meeting of the European Council (1 and 2 October) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁴¹ European Council. European Council meeting (16 December 2021) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-22-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁴² Council of the European Union. CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2016.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st13026_en-cfsp_report_2016.pdf

¹⁴³ Council of the European Union. CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2018.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11161-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁴⁴ Council of the European Union. Report of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "CFSP Report - Our priorities in 2021". https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10258-2021-INIT/en/pdf?utm_source

¹⁴⁵ Ibid; Council of the European Union. CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2019.

https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12963-2019-INIT/en/pdf?utm_source

neighbours; strengthening EU resilience to Russian threats; selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism; and support for people-to-people contacts.¹⁴⁶ These five conditions are repeatedly reaffirmed in the CFSP reports annually.

Accordingly, this vision accepts managed confrontation with Russia. In this respect, dialogues are “limited” but channels stay open; engagement is selective and issue-based (Syria, Libya, JCPOA),¹⁴⁷ an attitude the Council calls a “double-track approach of firmness coupled with diplomatic outreach”.¹⁴⁸ The tolerance line is drawn at escalatory force: by December 2021 leaders explicitly pre-position “massive” costs for “any further military aggression.”¹⁴⁹

The Borrell mission to Moscow in February 2021 is read in this logic as a test of reversibility (meaning, the EU *still* believes in this reversibility path): After this failed test, the CFSP 2021 notes the visit “aimed to test whether the Russian government was interested in reversing the negative trend,” but the “reaction” pointed “in a different direction,” followed by expulsions and countersanctions.¹⁵⁰ That episode affirmed wrongfulness of EU’s stance of conditional openness vis-à-vis Russia, which was exemplified by HR/VP being “outplayed” by Russia’s FM Sergei Lavrov’s, who called EU an “unreliable partner”, which was followed by Russia’s expulsion of diplomats from Germany, Sweden and Poland.¹⁵¹ This further proved the continuation of deterrence policy towards Russia.

In terms of security, the CFSP reports portrayed Russia as a “key strategic challenge,”¹⁵² although, a necessary interlocutor in multilateral files. Nevertheless, the move in 2021 to the formula “push back, constrain, engage”¹⁵³ makes explicit that Russia is primarily the reason the EU needs a stronger security architecture, not an integral component of it.

b) Instruments: where discourse meets practice

From March 2015, leaders link the duration of sectoral sanctions to Minsk; the Council then renews them because Minsk agreement was not implemented by the 31 December 2015 deadline. Over 2018–2021, instruments diversify: listings under the chemical weapons regime (Navalny), the cyber regime, and the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime; the European Council (June 2021) even invites options for additional restrictive measures, including economic sanctions.

¹⁴⁶ European Parliamentary Research Service, *The EU’s Russia Policy: Five Guiding Principles*, February 2018, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614698/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)614698_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614698/EPRS_BRI(2018)614698_EN.pdf)

¹⁴⁷ European Council. European Council meeting (24 and 25 June 2021) – Conclusions. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁴⁸ “CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2016.”

¹⁴⁹ “European Council meeting (16 December 2021) – Conclusions.”

¹⁵⁰ “CFSP Report - Our priorities in 2021.”

¹⁵¹ Jon Henley, “EU Chief’s Moscow Humiliation Is Sign of Bloc Disunity on Russia, Say Experts,” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/11/eu-chiefs-moscow-humiliation-is-sign-of-bloc-disunity-on-russia-say-experts>

¹⁵² “CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2018”; “CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2019”; Council of the European Union. “CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2020”, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5194-2021-INIT/en/pdf?utm_source

¹⁵³ “CFSP Report – Our priorities in 2021.”

When Russia acts aggressively, EU money flows into resilience of neighbours and monitoring: urgent macro-financial assistance for Ukraine (2015); sustained OSCE SMM support; a Sea of Azov support package after Kerch; and expanded EUAM Ukraine presence, including a field office in Mariupol (2020). These are budgetary choices that embody the policy frame.

This said, CFSP annual reports and EUCO conclusions do not fully encompass EU-Russia ties that *did* manage to continue and quite significantly so. For instance, economic and energy ties largely persisted up until 2022. Eurostat data show that EU–Russia trade in goods contracted in 2015–2016 but recovered by 2017–2019 and surged in 2021 to ~€257.5 bn (imports €158.5 bn, exports €89–99 bn), placing Russia among the EU’s top suppliers on the eve of the full-scale invasion.¹⁵⁴ As for the natural gas imports specifically, Russia’s share was at ~40% by the year 2021.¹⁵⁵

The EU adjusts structures by freezing high-level formats while keeping functional contacts: the 2016 CFSP notes dialogue and cooperation “remain limited,” yet “communication channels” are kept open and regional/cross-border cooperation programmes continue. In June 2021, leaders re-politicise engagement by asking for “formats and conditionalities of dialogue,” i.e., talks built around EU leverage. In addition to this, parallel legal frameworks (PCA, visa facilitation, readmission) remained in force through 2021, and high-level contacts between the EU officials and Russia continued, despite suspending bilateral summits in 2014. Nevertheless, the HR/VP’s 2021 February trip, followed by expulsions, effectively narrowed the space for such formats.

In other words, the objective is conditional reintegration; the instruments are sanctions-plus-resilience although with substantial dependence on Russia; the tolerance threshold is crossed by kinetic escalation; and the institutional architecture privileges issue-bounded, leverage-laden contact over partnership by 2021.

Underlying logic and conclusion

The period exhibits a hybrid, but with a clear drift toward securitisation:

In particular, throughout 2015–2017, the EU pairs legal conditionality with diplomatic outreach—the Council speaks of a “double-track approach of firmness coupled with diplomatic outreach,” and keeps “selective engagement” on global issues. This still presumes that rules-based integration might shape Russian behaviour if Minsk is implemented.

As for 2018–2021, this attitude shifts. Russia is repeatedly described as the EU’s “key strategic challenge,” sanctions are broadened (chemical, cyber, human-rights regimes), resilience to “hybrid threats” and “disinformation” is prioritised, and leaders threaten “massive consequences” for renewed aggression. Although apparent, this attitude change of the EU is gradual; this is exemplified in the HR/VP Borrell’s attempt to reason with Russia regarding the poisoning of Navalny and his according visit to Moscow; this means, he still believed in

¹⁵⁴ European Commission, *Archive: Russia-EU – International Trade in Goods Statistics, Statistics Explained* (archived), <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive%3ARussia-EU+%E2%80%93+international+trade+in+goods+statistics>

¹⁵⁵ “Share of extra-EU natural gas import value from Russia from 2010 to 1st quarter 2025”, *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1021735/share-russian-gas-imports-eu>

reversibility of the path that Russia was taking, although, on his way back to Brussels, he said: Russia has “not fulfilled expectations of becoming a modern democracy”; this phrase epitomises the culmination of EU’s gradual change of its stance vis-à-vis Russia.

As a result, the 2021 is characterised with deterrence and containment. The codified triad—“push back, constrain, engage”—formalises a security-first logic with tightly circumscribed engagement.

4.9. DARI Profile: Russia’s Full-Scale Invasion (2022–2024)

Average DARI Score: 4.9

Policy framing & tone of engagement

The EU’s language on Russia evolves fast and then settles into a hard line that never relaxes. In the first weeks of 2022, leaders move from “unprovoked and unjustified”¹⁵⁶ to the “war of aggression,”¹⁵⁷ “violation of the UN Charter”¹⁵⁸. By autumn 2022 the vocabulary widens into “weaponisation”¹⁵⁹—first pertaining to energy and food, then critical infrastructure, information, migration, and shipping. It represents a deliberate choice of wording as it recasts interdependence as a subject of leverage, used by Russia.

There are two framing shifts that are also new in EU discourse:

1. **“Russia must not prevail.”** From spring 2024 onward¹⁶⁰, this simple sentence appears several times. The significance of this phrase is connected to the underlying meaning, which goes beyond a plea to stop fighting, and sees this as a condition to victory. The EU does continue to impose sanctions, the scale of which are unprecedented, but it is stating, openly, that Russia’s defeat is now a policy aim. That is qualitatively different from the EU’s pre-2022 policy of “managing” Russia.
2. **“No initiative about Ukraine without Ukraine.”** By late-2023/2024¹⁶¹ this principle is explicit. It closes the door on classic great-power state of play and instead, hard-codes Ukrainian agency as a red line.

Further to this, the scale of the framing is particularly striking. Russia’s full-scale invasion exceeds solely Ukraine; instead, it is framed as “an existential threat” – “biggest in Europe since

¹⁵⁶ European Council. Special meeting of the European Council (24 February 2022) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-18-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁵⁷ European Council. European Council meeting (24 and 25 March 2022) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁵⁸ European Council. European Council meeting (20 and 21 October 2022) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-31-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ European Council. European Council meeting (21 and 22 March 2024) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁶¹ European Council. European Council meeting (17 October 2024) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-25-2024-INIT/en/pdf>

the Second World War”¹⁶², and it is taken into account in the instances when the EU refers to the relationship with countries in EaP, Western Balkans, Central Asia, Africa, Americas, China, Canada, Iran. The scale of repeated condemnation as well as the perceived impact of it is unprecedented.

In fact, the phrase “[EU] condemns in the strongest possible terms” is mentioned six times across documents over these three years, pertaining to Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine.

Tone follows the framing. What begins as outrage hardens into order-maintenance. Moral language is still peaking (atrocities, deportation of children, ICC warrants), but it is coupled to precise conditional clauses: assets remain immobilised until “Russia ceases its war of aggression against Ukraine and compensates it for the damage caused by this war”¹⁶³; any “peace” must be “comprehensive, just and lasting”¹⁶⁴, and anchored in the UN Charter. Gone is the older “selective engagement” phrasing; gone are gestures toward a future partnership with Russia.

There is a specific escalation in tone over the course of the three years; a visible reoccurring sentences in March; October and December 2024 EUCO conclusions that perfectly embody where the EU stands: “European Union is determined to continue providing Ukraine and its people all the necessary political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed.”[...] “Russia must not prevail”.

Apart from notable fragmentation of voices is evident. EU texts now frame Russia chiefly in terms of prohibition and constraint—withdrawal, payment, accountability. This is no isolated phrasing; it is an undeniable sign of institutional parting of ways.

EU objectives & instruments

By mid-2022 the EU has a stable triad of objectives, supported with layered tools underneath them:

(1) The EU changes the gear from “sanctions as message” to “sanctions as operating system”. In particular, Council’s objective which is stated and restated plainly - “Russia must

¹⁶² Council of the European Union. Report of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "Common Foreign and Security Policy Report - Our priorities in 2024."

https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11492-2024-INIT/en/pdf?utm_source

¹⁶³ European Council. European Council Meeting (19 December 2024) - Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-50-2024-INIT/en/pdf>;

¹⁶⁴ European Council. European Council Meeting (23 March 2023) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-4-2023-INIT/en/pdf>;

European Council. European Council Meeting (29 and 30 June, 2023) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7-2023-INIT/en/pdf>;

European Council. European Council Meeting (26 and 27 October 2023) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14-2023-INIT/en/pdf>;

European Council. European Council Meeting (14 and 15 December 2023) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-20-2023-INIT/en/pdf>;

European Council meeting (21 and 22 March 2024) – Conclusions;

European Council. European Council Meeting (27 June 2024) – Conclusions.

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15-2024-INIT/en/pdf>;

European Council meeting (17 October 2024) – Conclusions;

European Council Meeting (19 December 2024) – Conclusions.

not prevail” is backed with substantial instruments that harden overtime. sanctions move from packages to enforcement; In this respect, March 2024 is the hinge: leaders order the Council and Commission to “close all loopholes both inside and outside the Union. This includes preventing the circumvention of sanctions through third countries, and ensuring their enforcement, also as concerns subsidiaries of EU companies abroad.”¹⁶⁵ Additionally, listings expand to Iran/DPRK/Belarus when they feed Russia’s war machine; This can be perceived as a move from announcing a package to managing a regime.

(2) Keep Ukraine fighting, learning, and standing.

From late 2022, military aid ceases to be a string of donations and becomes a finance-plus-capability pipeline in following steps:

- a) European Peace Facility (EPF) → Ukraine Assistance Fund (UAF). EPF is topped up¹⁶⁶, then re-tooled in March 2024 to a dedicated €5bn UAF, keeping predictable financing for lethal support. Leaders insist on “timely, predictable and sustainable military support”.¹⁶⁷
- b) *Training at scale*: The EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) trains >50,000 by May 2024¹⁶⁸, with Council readiness to expand capacity. The language becomes frankly operational: “air defence systems, ammunition and missiles” are urgently needed (March through December 2024).
- c) War-economy coordination inside the Single Market: Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), the EU Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and proposed EDIP push joint orders and factory throughput.¹⁶⁹ The EU, famously a market polity, starts to act like a war-economy coordinator—a role it has never played at this scale.
- d) Budgetary backbone. The €50bn Ukraine Facility (2024–2027)¹⁷⁰ secures macro-support, reconstruction and reforms into an annual pipeline (“stable, predictable and sustainable”).

3) **Lock in the legal and financial end-state.** The innovative instrument here is the reparations lock. Between late-2023 and 2024, the EU designs a rule-bound way to channel extraordinary revenues from immobilised Russian central-bank assets into Ukraine’s budget, reconstruction, defence industry, and even military needs—and they write the condition that assets remain immobilised until Russia both stops the war and compensates for damage.

In parallel, the EU scales a civilian-security accountability ecosystem, including the establishment of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA) so that “justice” is actionable and “Russia is held fully accountable”.¹⁷¹

Underlying logic: developmentalism absent, emergence of co-evolution

¹⁶⁵ European Council meeting (21 and 22 March 2024) – Conclusions.

¹⁶⁶ European Council Meeting (29 and 30 June 2023) – Conclusions.

¹⁶⁷ European Council Meeting (14 and 15 December 2023) – Conclusions.

¹⁶⁸ "Common Foreign and Security Policy Report - Our priorities in 2024.

¹⁶⁹ European Council meeting (21 and 22 March 2024) – Conclusions.

¹⁷⁰ "Common Foreign and Security Policy Report - Our priorities in 2024.

¹⁷¹ European Council Meeting (29 and 30 June 2023) – Conclusions.

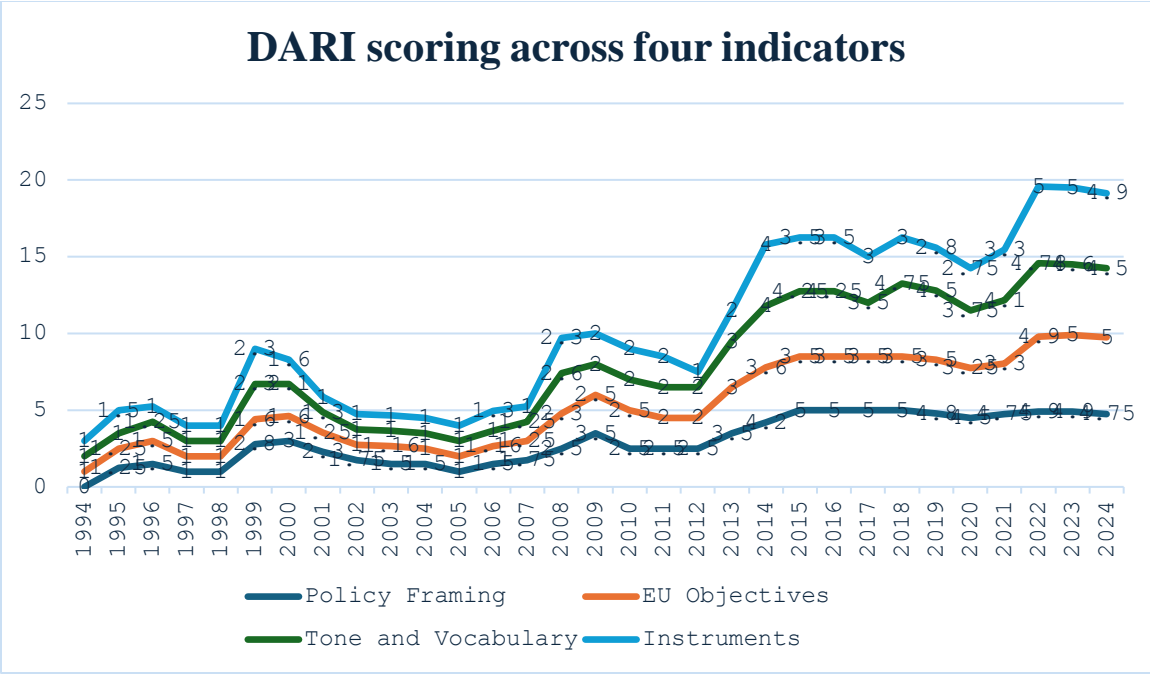
If developmentalism means offering reform-for-benefits pathways that socialise an actor into EU norms, the 2022–2024 record shows its deliberate absence toward Russia. It is a remarkable change precisely because developmentalism disappears structurally.

There is no sentence in the documents that offers Russia a reform-for-benefits ladder, no pathway back via “partnership,” no “selective engagement” carve-outs worth the name. Instead, the EU’s language about Russia does four things, consistently:

- Names and fixes the end-state in legal terms (withdrawal within recognised borders; compensation; accountability).
- Coercion becomes routine instead of an episode (sanction enforcement and anti-circumvention; asset-revenue mechanisms; third-country pressure).
- Interdependence is understood in the prism of threat, not a vector of convergence (hence “weaponisation” across energy, food, migration, information).
- Plans for time, not for thaw (long-term security commitments to Ukraine; industrial policy to out-produce; enlargement to lock in a non-Russian centre of gravity).

In other words, developmentalism is no longer relevant *modus operandi* for the EU; instead, it adopts coevolution – it changes itself so that a revisionist opponent’s options shrink over time. Hence, the main strategy becomes reengineering Russia’s opportunity structure.

Chapter 5: Comparative Discussion



Taken together, the four key indicators—policy framing, tone and vocabulary, objectives, and instruments—reveal a pattern of striking divergences and often deliberate contradictions. These divergences disclose the logic of how the European Union managed its simultaneous dependence on Russia and its need for normative coherence. What emerges is an uneven interaction between language and practice:

1. Policy Framing and Tone

Looking at framing and tone collectively, the most apparent pattern is the EU’s “forget-repeat cycle”; Every new force projection from Russia triggered a relatively sharper language, but it evaporated as quickly as it had emerged. In this regard, tone served as an instrument that allowed the Union to reconcile irreconcilables — condemning violence (if at all), while keeping cooperation viable. Only after 2022 did framing and tone fully align in a language of confrontation.

A key turning point was 2014. Since then, the principle of non-recognition of Crimea has become a constitutional anchor of EU foreign policy. Framing and language acquired an institutional weight that ensured no “reset” could erase Crimea from the EU’s discourse.

This transformation looks all the starker when contrasted with earlier years: for most of the post-Cold War period, tone was deliberately welcoming, couched in the language of “dialogue,” “encouragement,” or “support.” The effect was to remove agency from Russia’s actions: violence was reframed as a problem, a “crisis” never a deliberate move made by Moscow. This was an intentionally chosen tone that allowed the EU to protect the *strategic partnership* narrative while appearing to acknowledge outcomes of Russia’s actions.

At the same time, the EU often imported Moscow’s vocabulary, in ways that blunted its own framing. In the Second Chechen War, “anti-terrorism” became the shared narrative — reframing Russia’s war as a joint struggle. After Georgia, Sarkozy’s line that Russia’s invasion was a

“reaction”, essentially validated Moscow’s storyline of provocation. Even post-2014, sometimes cast aggression in terms of “parties to the conflict”, resembling the Kremlin’s civil-war narrative. Here, tone and framing were instruments of *co-optation*: by softening its own voice, the EU created space to continue engaging Russia on Moscow’s terms.

In addition to this, tone and vocabulary reveal an interesting logic, when put next to the instruments used. In particular, outrage at times substituted for absent leverage. For instance, peaks in rhetorical sharpness: 1999 during the Second Chechen War, 2008 after Georgia, and especially 2014 often coincided with moments when instruments lagged behind. Harsh words bought time, allowing leaders to project unity while material measures were still under negotiation. Thus, outrage was the cheapest and fastest instrument available, and at key junctures it was deployed to mask the slow action.

By 2022, vocabulary shifted tone once more. Outrage was increasingly operationalised into verbs of delivery: “accelerate,” “implement,” “enforce.” Language, thus, ceased to be merely denunciatory; it became managerial, reflecting the EU’s role not simply in condemning Russia but in organising itself and its partners for war-time governance. Tone was no longer about preserving space for partnership; it was about foreclosing it.

2. EU Objectives and Instruments

If framing and tone describe how the EU spoke about Russia, objectives and instruments reveal what it sought to achieve and how it tried to achieve it. Over the course of these thirty years, four distinct phases of objectives can be distinguished: 1. Strategic partnership 2. Principled engagement 3. Conditional engagement 4. Isolation.

When the EU declared its aim to build a *strategic partnership* with Russia, its instruments were institutional: summits, “common spaces,” sectoral dialogues, and financing channels. These were tools of reassurance, designed to protect the very architecture of partnership. Even moments of apparent conditionality — the PCA ratification delay in 1994, the suspension of talks after Georgia in 2008— quickly gave way to workarounds and resumptions. In practice, the instrument became the objective: sustaining engagement formats alive was treated as success in itself.

After the war in Georgia, the EU officially rebranded its approach as “principled engagement,” described in the 2009 and 2010 CFSP reports as “searching for opportunities to develop our relations with Russia where possible, but standing firm on our principles where necessary.” However, this definition never materialised and it never overshadowed the overarching “strategic partnership”. In reality, “principles” remained rhetorical, while the instruments remained geared toward resumption.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 appeared to force a rupture. The EU started to effectively dismantle cooperative mechanisms while layering restrictive measures, but this process was carefully selective. EU created a “proto hierarchy” of sanctionable versus untouchable domains, structured by its dependence, i.e. precisely the moment the EU declared that “it cannot be business as usual,” the most significant business - energy flows - remained intact.

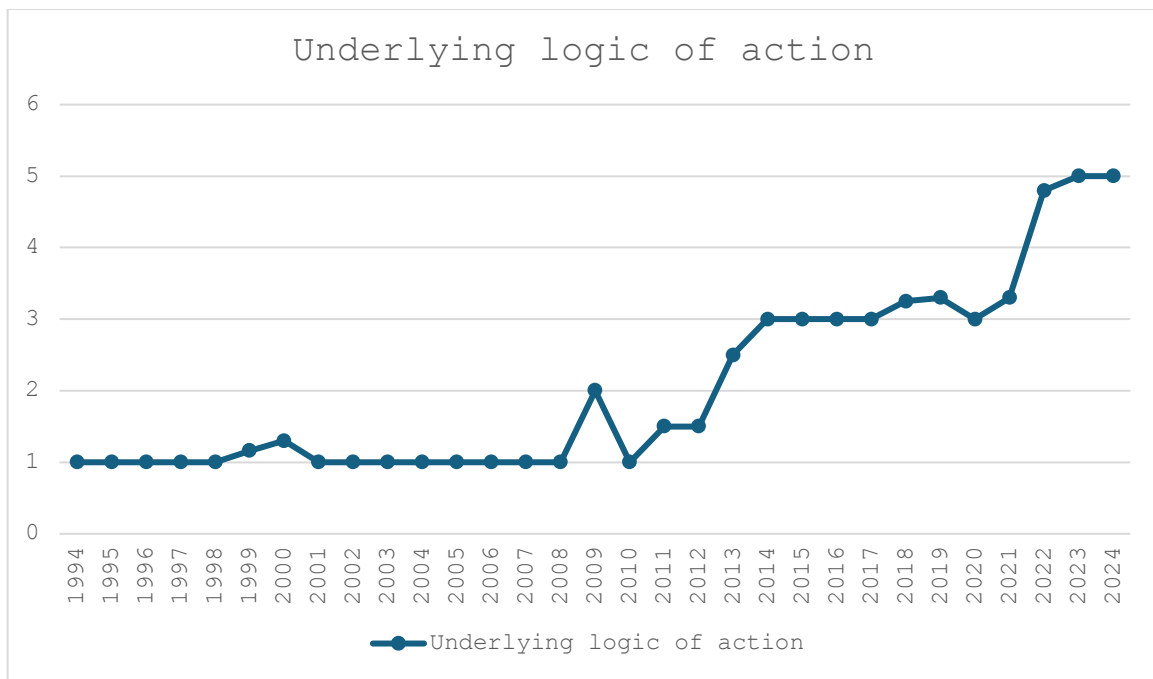
Nevertheless, even after framing and tone had reached confrontational registers, and selective but still significant sanctions materialised, objectives remained defined by the logic of conditional engagement as it was informed by five guiding conditions outlined in 2016. By doing this, Brussels created a discursive device that postponed the hardest question — whether partnership with Russia was still possible. Therefore, conditionality was a strategic and deliberate move:

1. Conditionality shifted responsibility into the future. By tying policy to benchmarks, the EU could appear firm without admitting that Moscow’s trajectory was irreconcilable with European order. “No business as usual until Minsk” implied that business as usual might yet return.
2. Unity through ambiguity: Because conditionality carried a reversible promise, it allowed hawkish member states to insist on sanctions while dovish ones could cling to the prospect of eventual normalisation. Sanctions thus functioned less as coercive instruments and more as political glue for an otherwise fractured Union.
3. Precisely because sanctions were presented as “temporary,” they coexisted with deepening economic integration. Energy dependence was rationalised as a stopgap until compliance — reinforcing, rather than undermining, the structures of vulnerability.

The full-scale invasion broke this cycle. For the first time, objectives were formulated around what the EU itself must deliver: *Russia must not prevail; Ukraine must be sustained*. Instruments — sanctions, arms transfers, macro-financial packages, enlargement as a security shield — were designed to isolate Russia. But this convergence can hardly be perceived as evidence of gradual learning. It comes only because all previous models — strategic partnership, principled engagement, conditional engagement — had been exhausted.

3. Underlying Logic of Action

After stripping away the rhetoric of objectives and the technicality of instruments, what remains is the underlying logic that tied them together: a belief that Russia could, and should, be steered towards convergence with Europe.



Developmentalism as a default

EU discourse treated Russia as a state-in-progress. Even if flawed and turbulent, it was believed to be moving “towards its rightful place in the European family.” This is exemplified in the scoring pattern of the Underlying Logic indicator. More specifically, locked at “1” for more than a decade, creeping only gradually upward until 2014, and reaching “5” only after Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022 reveals that the EU’s fundamental expectations about Russia were not falsified by repeated force projections up until 2022; instead, they were *re-purposed to absorb them*. Every act of aggression was narrated as either a problem of capacity (Russia not yet democratic enough) or of situational pressure (Russia obliged to act as a “saviour” of the oppressed). The EU could condemn Russian actions as “illegal,” suspend summits, or redirect funds — and still treat it as a strategic partner on a delayed but ultimately converging trajectory.

This is arguably the single most revealing finding of the DARI framework. It suggests that the EU’s patience was rooted in a belief system that Russia was destined to modernise if only the EU kept channels open.

Optimism as self-preservation

Why was developmentalism so tenacious? Because it did not only describe Russia, but it also described the EU itself. To cast Russia as transformable was to cast the EU as a transformative power. This self-image was institutionally entrenched: enlargement success in Central Europe was projected eastward, EU neighbourhood instruments multiplied, and Brussels read interdependence as an inexhaustible source of leverage. This explains why even the harshest crises produced conditionality. Because to abandon developmentalism would have meant abandoning a cornerstone of the EU’s self-conception.

The delayed recognition of antagonism

What changes after 2022 is the fact that once tanks rolled on Kyiv, there was no discursive room

left to treat Russia as a state-in-transition. The EU's logic flipped from transformation to exclusion: Russia was re-perceived as structurally adversarial, incapable of convergence, a spoiler rather than a partner. The new logic is doctrinal: Russia must be contained, Ukraine must be anchored in Europe, enlargement must serve as a barrier. In other words, the Union shifted from a developmentalist to a securitised ontology: Russia is what it is, not what it might become.

Coevolution and normativity

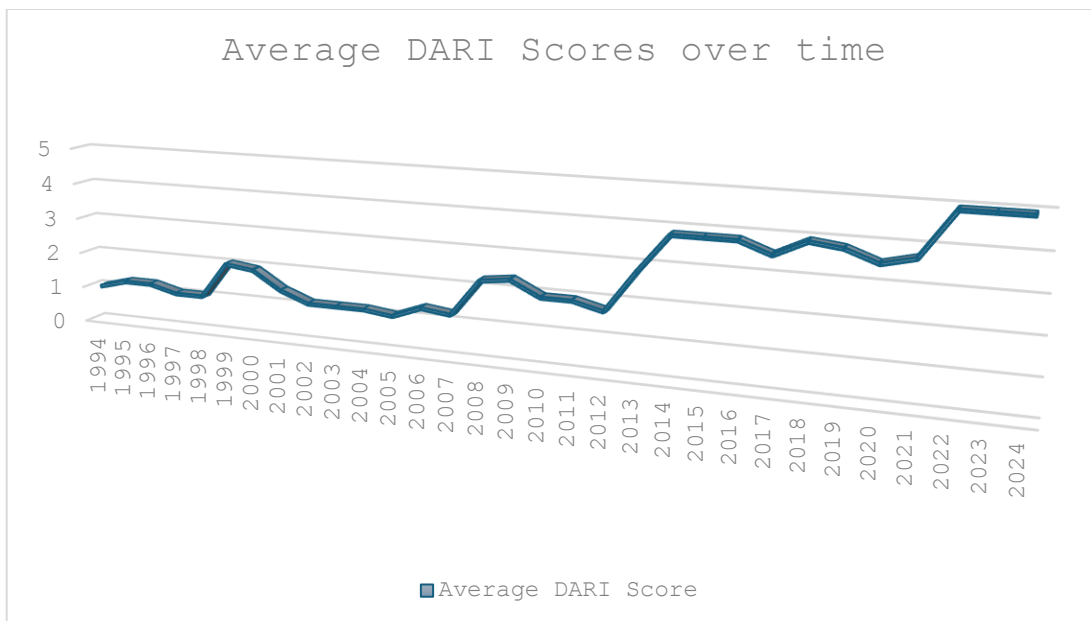
The delayed recognition of antagonism cannot be explained solely by EU's passivity; it requires a coevolutionary lens. From this perspective, the EU and Russia – two opposing poles of normativity, were co-producing a conflictual order, as norms are not static benchmarks to which actors converge but they are co-constructed through ongoing interactions. The EU operated within a liberal normative order, where rules-based governance and sovereignty as an absolute legal principle were central. It assumed that integration into a rules-based system was both desirable and inevitable. Russia, by contrast, formed an order, in which sovereignty was relative, contingent on power; smaller states existed within a hierarchical international order, where influence was dictated by great-power status rather than multilateral institutions.

The EU's developmentalist logic assumed that engagement would soften these divergences, leading to gradual alignment. However, from a coevolutionary perspective, normativity itself is an evolving construct, meaning that actors do not merely adapt to an imposed system - they actively redefine the rules of engagement. Russia did not simply resist EU norms; it developed counteractions, framing its own role as an alternative to Western liberalism.

Thus, coevolution reveals why EU-Russia relations became a cycle of adaptation and counter-adaptation rather than a smooth trajectory toward cooperation. Russia, rather than converging toward the EU's normative framework, adapted by reinforcing its own hierarchical, sovereignty-centric model, strategically utilising economic engagement while resisting values-based alignment.

In this sense, the collapse of developmentalism was not merely the result of external compulsion but the endpoint of a coevolutionary cycle. The EU's insistence on Russia's transformability created the very permissive environment in which Moscow could escalate, while Russia, in turn, learned to instrumentalise this optimism to prevent being redefined as an adversary. By 2022, however, escalation reached a point where the EU's self-conception and its credibility collided. The Union did not grow out of developmentalism; it was forced out of it — by a logic it had itself helped to enable.

Conclusion



This thesis set out to explain why an EU that repeatedly witnessed Russian force projection kept speaking—as late as 2021—the language of partnership and gradual convergence. The answer that emerges from the DARI evidence is simple without being simplistic: developmentalism was the policy backbone. It organised how the Union named events, what it asked for, and which tools it was willing to use. It also explains the long delay: as long as Russia could be kept inside the conceptual category of “transformable partner,” sharper instruments could be rationed, and crises could be filed under “setbacks” rather than “structure.”

Seen through this lens, the four indicators do not tell four stories. They resolve into one. Framing hardened faster than objectives because legal labels were the least costly way to acknowledge reality. Tone swung because it had to carry the burden of unity while instruments lagged. Objectives clung to conditional engagement well into the sanctions period because conditionality outsourced the hardest admission: that the horizon of renewed partnership had collapsed. What finally moved all four together was collapse of developmentalism; the EU acted when credibility became both unaffordable to ignore and, at last, affordable to uphold.

The latter becomes clearer when looked through the lens of coevolution - a cycle of mutual adaptation. The EU spoke in the language of transformation; Russia learned to weaponise that optimism. The EU framed Russia as improvable; Moscow used the time and space to entrench itself as irreconcilable. Developmentalism failed because escalation reached a point where the EU’s credibility and its self-conception could no longer coexist. In 2022, Russia did not simply break the rules; it broke the discourse that had long allowed the EU to imagine Russia as a partner-in-progress.

In answering the research question, this thesis makes three contributions. First, it provides a comprehensive empirical account to date of how the EU’s discourse tracked both crises and “peace periods,” showing that the moments of calm were as revealing as the moments of conflict. Second, it reinterprets three decades of institutional language through the developmentalist lens, exposing the extent to which the EU’s discourse was an act of self-

preservation as much as foreign policy. Third, it advances methodological innovation through the Developmentalism–Aggression Response Index (DARI), which disaggregates discourse into layered indicators, explaining not only that the EU shifted by why it waited and what finally forced the change.

In short, DARI charts the steady write-down of the EU’s belief in Russia’s transformability, crisis by crisis, until only one question remains. As Arthur Miller put it, “an era ends when its illusions are exhausted”. Has Brussels reached that point?

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