

Ketevan KERASHVILI

Shaping EU's foreign policy towards Russia:

Assessing the Impact of Russia's return to power politics

Abstract

In view of a shift in Russian foreign policy towards more aggressive methods since president Putin came to power, the European Union (EU) faces significant problems in defining its strategy towards Russia. In recent years, the relationship between the two parties has been characterized by tensions. Events in the last decade, such as the Russian-Georgian war, the disruption of energy supplies as well as other controversial issues, have affected the threat perceptions of EU member states and increased their concerns. On the other hand, however, it is in the EU's interest to develop good relations with Russia considering the importance of economic interdependence and other pressing issues, such as the energy question, fight against terrorism, etc.

The aim of the present research is to grasp and assess EU-Russian relations through an analysis of the impact Moscow's return to power politics has on shaping foreign policy of the EU towards Russia. For this purpose, this paper analyzes the EU member states' perceptions of Russia in order to account for their stance towards it. In addition, it shows, how Russian foreign policy actions and the hard-line position of Russian leaders during negotiations affect attitudes within the EU. Therefore, it also demonstrates, how the European Union's foreign policy is shaped through combining the importance of values as a factor underlying European foreign policy, and the different attitudes and positions of the member states.

To achieve its objectives, this paper draws on content and discourse analysis, examining the official declarations and statements of authorized persons. In addition, the positions taken by the EU and its member states are discussed in the context of the most recent and most important cases which significantly affected the EU-Russian relations and which clearly reveal the development of a position towards Russia. Based on the analysis of the EU's dilemma concerning its relations with Russia, the present work draws implications and gives recommendations with regard to the importance of an understanding and a cohesive stance within the EU towards Russia in order to find the best approach.

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