



## 50 Years of the European Integration and Russia

Vladimir Putin

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While pondering the 50th anniversary of the European Union one is involuntarily prompted to think about history. Two thousand years ago Roman soldiers united enormous territories from Britain to Athens, from the Rhine to the Iberian Peninsula by the sword. Europe has survived many destructive wars and the collapse of empires. It overcame the dictatorship of tyrants and the horrors of Nazism, but at the same time lived through the Renaissance and sowed the seeds of democracy. It was Europe that formulated the noble ideas of Humanism and Enlightenment which formed the foundation of European civilisation.

As often happens, history made an astonishing turn - it was in Rome, the Eternal City, where 50 years ago treaties were signed which laid the foundation for a new association of European nations. This association was based not on force or coercion but on common aspirations and values.

Half a century ago the Treaties of Rome were in many respects innovative and almost revolutionary for their time. Many wounds of World War II had still not healed. But the signatory countries managed to demonstrate political will to work out a joint strategy of cooperation and integration while overcoming the burdens of the past.

The founding fathers of the Pan-European movement dreamed about "the prosperity, peace and independence of the continent". They were right in guessing the future, realising that security and well-being are indivisible. The establishment of the European Communities on 25 March 1957 had an enormous influence in shaping contemporary Europe. Based on the ideas of the Treaties of Rome, the EU states were able to further the rights and freedoms of citizens and achieve economic and social progress.

But it was only the end of the Cold War which brought about real conditions for the fulfilment of the "fundamental" European idea – the unification of the continent. This was "the peace dividend" following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The Russian people's choice in the early Nineties did not merely expand the space of freedom on the continent but actually determined the path of further European integration.

In many respects this choice was defined by the national history of Russia. In terms of spirit and culture Russia is an integral part of European civilisation. Our people made an invaluable contribution to its development. You cannot imagine European culture without the music of Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich, the writings of Tolstoy and Nabokov, the art of Kandinsky and Malevich.

The history of relations between Russia and Europe is one of mutual influence and benefit. St. Petersburg, my native city, became a magnificent northern capital thanks to architects and artists from Western Europe, many of whom treated

Russia as their second home. Symbolically, the people of the city withstood a 900-day blockade by fascist troops in the Second World War, heroically resisting a barbaric ideology that was and is the very antithesis of everything "European".

In his famous Pushkin speech, Fyodor Dostoevsky gave what I would call a political and philosophical definition of Russia's European mission: "Being a true Russian will ultimately mean bringing reconciliation to Europe's contradictions." The great writer sensed perfectly that Europe would never be itself in the world without Russia and, at the same time, that Russia would never cease its "longing for Europe". I strongly believe the full unity of our continent can never be achieved until Russia, as the largest European state, becomes an integral part of the European process.

The reforms of Peter the Great were a decisive step towards the modernisation of the country and firmly introduced Russia into European politics. Since then, Russia has shared all the triumphs and tragedies of Europe, including what the philosopher Berdyayev called its "twilight" period. We have twice played a decisive role in disrupting attempts to unite Europe by force, the last time during World War II. Today's European project, based on the good will of Europeans, would have been unfeasible without this.

Today, building a sovereign democratic state, we fully share the fundamental values and principles of the vast majority of Europeans. Respect for international law, rejection of the use of force in settling international problems and preference for strengthening common approaches in European and global politics are factors that unite us. In our joint work within the UN, the G8 and other multilateral forums, we always feel we share a common view of the world.

A stable, prosperous and united Europe is in our interests. We view European integration as an objective process, representing an integral part of the emerging multi-polar world order. Therefore it is important for us to see that the EU is becoming an increasingly authoritative and influential centre of world politics, considerably contributing to regional and global security.

The development of multifaceted ties with the EU is Russia's principled choice. It is true that in the foreseeable future, for obvious reasons, we have no intention of either joining the EU or establishing any form of institutional association with it. Viewing the situation in a realistic light, Russia intends to build its relations with the EU on the basis of a treaty and a strategic partnership. In this regard I agree with Romano Prodi's formula of our relationship with the EU: "Anything but institutions".

I would like to underline that we are prepared to develop this partnership to a maximum extent, expecting of course that our partners will meet us half way along this road.

Our common goal of comprehensive, intensive and long-term cooperation is bringing tangible results. Our joint efforts have already allowed us to build a solid foundation for a strategic partnership and promising joint projects. There is an increasing dialogue between various sectors of industry. We have a deepening sense of fellowship in our common struggle against new threats. Bilateral trade relations are flourishing and investments are growing. Cultural, humanitarian and educational contacts are widening. In the nearest future the Visa Facilitation Agreement will become effective - I recently signed the law ratifying it. We regard this agreement as an important step towards the introduction of a visa-free regime.

The interests of Russia and the EU will not always coincide in all respects. Competition is the reverse side of cooperation and an integral part of the process of globalisation. At the same time, one should not, for instance, see political intrigues behind purely economic measures. One should not superimpose Cold War ideological labels on legal and quite understandable actions aimed at protecting our national interests. Let me say again: we are ready to settle any differences through open dialogue and compromise, based on mutually agreed rules.

I am convinced the development of relations between Russia and the EU has logically led us to the need for a Treaty on Strategic Partnership to replace the 10-year old Agreement that will soon expire. The Treaty should become an instrument capable of ensuring a higher level of economic integration and interaction, providing for freedom and security on the European continent. We understand all the difficulties of our partners to come to an agreed position on the new Treaty. We agree it takes time. But it is also clear that any pause in the dialogue is always going to be counterproductive.

Now we have something to think about together. The choice to be made will determine the future outlook of the continent for many decades to come. We should not let bloc mentalities prevail in European politics, nor should we allow new dividing lines to appear on our continent or unilateral projects to be implemented to the detriment of the interests and security of our neighbours. We also expect the evolution of the EU will serve to strengthen the unity of our common continent, to develop broad cooperation in Europe.

I am convinced that only on a genuinely collective, trustworthy basis is it possible to find solutions to the world's problems: the question of anti-missile defences in Europe, the stabilisation of Afghanistan, how we deal with an entire range of new challenges and threats, including international terrorism, the non-proliferation of WMD, drug trafficking, illegal immigration and global poverty. Russia stands ready for that. I hope the choice will be made in favour of mutual efforts to construct our common future.

Half a century ago six European nations, principally the French and the Germans, firmly decided to put aside former enmities and, as Angela Merkel has noted, "grow together". The people of the new democratic Russia sincerely want their country to become a prosperous power living a dignified life in friendship and harmony with their neighbours.

We wish our European partners success, and count on continuing fruitful cooperation for the benefit of peace and progress.

[http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/03/25/1133\\_type104017\\_120756.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/03/25/1133_type104017_120756.shtml)