

PRESIDENT-ELECT VLADIMIR PUTIN

THE EUROPE FACTOR



Russia is an inalienable and organic part of Greater Europe and European civilization. Our citizens think of themselves as Europeans. We are by no means indifferent to developments in united Europe.

That is why Russia proposes moving towards the creation of a common economic and human space from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean – a community referred by Russian experts to as "the Union of Europe," which will strengthen Russia's potential and position in its economic pivot toward the "new Asia." We have a stake in ensuring a strong EU, as envisioned by Germany and France. It is in our interests to realize the enormous potential of the Russia-EU partnership.

The current level of cooperation between Russia and the European Union does not correspond to current global challenges, above all making our shared continent more competitive. I propose again that we work toward creating a harmonious community of economies from Lisbon to Vladivostok, which will in the future evolve into a free trade zone and even more advanced forms of economic integration. The resulting common continental market would be worth trillions of euros. Does anyone doubt that this would be a wonderful development and that it would meet the interests of both Russians and Europeans?

We must also consider more extensive cooperation in the energy sphere, up to and including the formation of a common European energy complex. The Nord Stream gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea and the South Stream pipeline under the Black Sea are important steps in that direction. These projects have the support of many governments and involve major European energy companies. Once the pipelines start operating at full capacity, Europe will have a reliable and flexible gas-supply system that does not depend on the political whims of any nation. This will strengthen the continent's energy security not only in form but in substance. This is particularly relevant in the light of the decision of some European states to reduce or renounce nuclear energy.

The Third Energy Package, backed by the European Commission and aimed at squeezing out integrated Russian companies, is frankly not conducive to stronger relations between Russia and the EU. Considering the growing instability of energy suppliers that could act as an alternative to Russia, the package aggravates the systemic risks to the European energy sector and scares away potential investors in new infrastructure projects. Many European politicians have been critical of the package in their talks with me. We should summon the courage to remove this obstacle to mutually beneficial cooperation.

I believe that genuine partnership between Russia and the European Union is impossible as long as there are barriers that impede human and economic contacts, first and foremost visa requirements... In December 2011 we agreed with the EU on "joint steps" toward a visa-free regime. They can and should be taken without delay. We should continue to actively pursue this goal.

US plans to create a missile defense system in Europe give rise to legitimate fears in Russia. Why does that system worry us more than others? Because it affects the strategic nuclear deterrence forces that only Russia possesses in that theatre, and upsets the military-political balance established over decades. The inseparable link between missile defense and strategic offensive weapons is reflected in the New START treaty signed in 2010. The treaty has come into effect and is working fairly well. It is a major foreign policy achievement. We are ready to consider various options for our joint agenda with the Americans in the field of arms control in the coming period. In this effort we must seek to balance our interests and renounce any attempts to gain one-sided advantages through negotiations.

From the article Russia in the Changing World