



Boris Nemtsov
Foundation for Freedom



IMPACT STUDY ON *RUSSIA 2030 FUTURES*

Pavel Havlicek, Evgeny Romanovskiy, Marta Shumanov, Morgan Braun

with the support of Czech Priorities



31 January 2025

Introduction

This Impact Study aims to follow up on the original publication “[Russia 2030 Futures](#)” issued in September 2024. It provides new alternative perspectives and critical reflections and delves deeper into the implications of the five originally proposed scenarios for the future of Russia from the point of view of the European Union (EU). The purpose of the study is to illustrate the stakes for the EU regarding potential developments that can challenge both the EU and the broader Western community. Additionally, it will provide detailed insights into the responses required from the EU.

Each of the scenarios explored in this study reflects a critical dimension of the complex challenges posed by Russia’s future trajectory. Together, they provide a multifaceted framework for understanding how regional dynamics, domestic instability, and international ambitions intersect to shape the environment in which the EU operates. The scenarios are not meant to represent isolated events but rather interconnected threads of a broader tapestry, where shifts in one area may have cascading effects on others. Their inclusion is essential to ensure that the analysis captures the full spectrum of risks and opportunities for the EU, emphasizing the need for a holistic and anticipatory approach to policy-making.

In addition, the publication offers a critical view of the original text and elaborates further on the necessary preconditions and contexts in which the scenarios are taking place.

Overall, the Impact Study strives to further mobilize the attention of policy- and decision-makers working on EU-Russia relations. It also is intended for the broader foreign policy and security community working on the region of Eastern Europe as well as the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy/Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSD/CSDP). The issues discussed are particularly relevant in the context of the Polish EU Presidency, planning to prioritize relations with Eastern Europe as one of its goals.

The publication follows the same methodology as the original “Russia 2030 Futures” publication.¹ In addition, it draws on the experience from the strategic foresight community, in particular of [Scenario Management International \(ScMI\)](#), working with the impact study method to translate the creative thinking behind the foresight exercise into a more concrete policy-oriented document for the decision-makers, which can then make informed choices, as well as plan for the mid- to long-term future, which is missing in the current state of play in the EU-Russia relations.

¹ The project used the method of strategic foresight and, stemming from that, a scenario-building exercise, which originates from the private sector and the risk analysis industry. The methodology has been used on a number of occasions by the EU institutions, including most prominently the European Commission and its Joint Research Centre, as well as other policy and research centers and the think tank community (e.g.: Lozka, K. (2023, July 19). *Policy report: How Russia’s war on Ukraine can impact Belarus - 3 scenarios*. Visegrad Insight. <https://visegradinsight.eu/policy-report-how-russias-war-on-ukraine-can-impact-belarus-3-scenarios/>).

In addition, the publication collaborated with the Czech Priorities, a Prague-based research think tank, and its Expert Forecasting Team, on attributing percentage points to key events in each of the scenarios. In the text, these percentage points are displayed in boxes corresponding to each scenario, representing its probability and likelihood of taking place, which is significant from the perspective of decision- and policy-makers and their considerations of different options. The report from the Expert Forecasting Team is included in the Attachment and serves as an integral part and logical continuation of the presented work.

Thus, this follow-up impact Study on Russia 2030 Futures should further promote strategic thinking on the side of the EU members and institutions. This is necessary to make the EU's response to Russian actions and its involvement in Ukraine sustainable in the future. It is also important to prepare the European Union for various kinds of disruptive and unexpected events (*black swans*) that, while unlikely, could have significant implications and impacts on the EU itself. This document aims to further explore these possibilities and translate them into actionable policies. Both action and in fact *inaction* would have their price that could shape the future of the whole community, including most notably the eastern flank of both the EU and NATO, since these are the countries often bordering Russia itself.

The text is split into five sections, each related to the critical review of one of the five scenarios of Russia 2030 Futures: (1) *Russia After Putin: Preparation for Transition*, (2) *Russo-Chinese Partnership Without Limits as a Challenge for the West*, (3) *Chechnya: Risks of Destabilization and Impact on the European Union*, (4) *Russian Stalemate: Consequences of Ukraine's Success*, (5) *the "Ruskiy Mir" and Belarus: Potential Scenarios and the Impact on the EU*. Every section is structured in two parts. The first part elaborates on the impact of the scenario on the EU. The second proposes a set of scenario-specific recommendations and normative actions needed to minimize the risks to the EU and maximize its resilience opportunities for the EU and its international partners. The final section of the report provides a general conclusion of the Impact Study and a set of overarching recommendations, which are generally applicable to the EU in its future approach to Russia in the years to come.

Scenarios – a Critical View

Russia After Putin: Preparation for Transition

Forecasters of the Czech Priorities judge that there is a **30% probability** that Ukraine and the Russian Federation will sign a comprehensive peace treaty before 2031. See Attachment for more details.

The first scenario, *Russia After Putin*, represents a period of partial normalization in relations between Russia and the West with a loosened sanctions regime and gradual reintegration of Russia into the wider European economy. This period is likely to begin right before or in 2030, with a generally peaceful transfer of power. The transition can occur either via a presidential election in the event that Putin decides not to run for office at the end of his current term (2024-2030). Alternatively, a more complex political process may unfold if Putin were to die before the conclusion of his term. While the terms of the transition are relevant to Russian society, the policy implications for the EU will be virtually the same in either circumstance since the deeply embedded regime would start to change.

With Putin still in power, the new Republican leadership in the US would most likely attempt to broker a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine around 2025-2026, however, the parties would find it difficult to negotiate more specific terms. A negative peace scenario would be established with parts of Ukraine's territory remaining neutral. Crimea's return to Ukraine would be out of the question in exchange for new guarantees of Ukrainian neutrality (Ukraine ultimately not joining NATO and the EU). After an unsuccessful peace-making attempt and due to internal political, social, and economic challenges, the US would turn elsewhere, particularly to the Indo-Pacific region, while limiting support for Ukraine. After Putin, the US might become open to resetting the relationship with Russia as long as the new technocratic government of Russia makes a substantial effort to normalize relations.

With the continued rise of national-conservative political powers in the West, the war fatigue and the refugee crisis, the EU would continue moderately supporting Ukraine; however, the main focus will shift towards the internal EU agenda as the countries gear up to 2030. The EU enlargement process will continue with the Western Balkan countries being the first in line. The Eastern Partnership countries will remain behind due to political instability in the region, manifested in Moldova after the parliamentary elections in the summer of 2025 as well as in Georgia. With the US turning to the Indo-Pacific, the EU will be forced to focus on its own military capacity, grow its defense budget, and strengthen regional security institutions such as the European pillar within NATO, or the OSCE architecture. With the new Russian government taking over near 2030, many EU countries would be cautious about returning to business as usual, however, economic necessities and reliance on natural resources would push Europe towards cooperation with Russia. At the same time, a bigger discussion would open on the new security architecture in Europe

following the logic of the Helsinki process of the 1970s, with the new Russian government as a part of the discussion.

With a relatively peaceful transition of power around 2030, the predominantly technocratic new government of Russia would advocate for a complete reset in relations with the West akin to the Khrushchev Thaw (*'ottepel'*). The EU and the US would attempt to use the sanctions regime as a bargaining chip for ending the war in Ukraine. However, the gradual militarization of Russia's economy until at least 2027 would lead the country to accept the *status quo* and reorient itself to internal and Eastern markets, therefore becoming more immune to significant economic pressure from the West, despite some initial losses from the original economic potential. The new leadership of Russia will negotiate new agreements with the EU and the US to include relaxing the sanctions regime on consumer goods, the return of international companies, and, most importantly, new natural resources and energy arrangements. This would allow the new leadership to save face before the Russian people and to sweep the negative effects of the war in Ukraine under the carpet in exchange for a promise of a period of moderate economic growth. This period would also constitute a resurgence of civil society (including nonprofit organizations that would take on the role of supporting vulnerable groups in the post-war society), however, its role in influencing politics would remain relatively low.

Recommendations

Leading up to 2030, the EU must reorient its position in the global economy and politics. With the EU-US relations becoming more volatile, based on internal processes and procedures on both sides of the Atlantic, the EU must take more responsibility for its geopolitical future, including its relations with Ukraine and Russia. While being forced to increase military spending, it also needs to focus on technological advancement and defense measures. The EU would need to secure reassurance that the US would comply with its NATO obligations under the Republican government in 2025-2028 and gradually more and more in the future. Internally, a lot can be gained from strengthening inter-EU defense cooperation through the OSCE, and within the European pillar of NATO.

The EU's energy and natural resource dependence on Russia needs to continue decreasing to ensure the EU's political stability and territorial integrity, while also advancing the green transition. In that context, EU countries need to ensure maximum compliance with the EU's Green Deal and diversify their energy sources away from Russia. This way, the EU can negotiate more advantageous energy agreements with Russia after Putin's leadership ends.

In order to facilitate a peaceful transition of power in Russia around 2030, the EU should continue to keep communication channels with Russia open while having a firm stance on the war in Ukraine and the territorial security of the EU. The EU needs to prepare a consolidated plan and outline the red lines and conditions for normalizing political and economic relations with Russia when the power transition occurs. The EU needs to appear as a united front in future normalization talks; the

current divisions are only weakening the EU in the eyes of the Kremlin's leadership. Before and during the power transition in Russia, the EU needs to continue supporting the Russian civil society in exile and within the country whenever possible and continue investing in the independence of the media.

Russo-Chinese Partnership Without Limits as a Challenge for the West

Forecasters of the Czech Priorities judge that before 2031 there is a **small probability** of the People's Republic of China being involved in an armed conflict of high intensity with **Japan (6% probability), India (4%), Philippines (3%), Vietnam (3%)**. See Attachment for more details.

The Metaculus community currently predicts that while the threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is **negligible by 2025, by 2030, the probability is estimated to range between 14% and 39%, with a median of 25%.**²

The original *Russia 2030 Futures* scenario *Russia's Pivot Amid Sino-American Confrontation* suggested the possibility of a Russian victory, driven by full-scale Chinese support, escalated by a major confrontation over Taiwan in the South China Sea. The double confrontation would further bolster the Russo-Chinese partnership without limits³ that would—even if facing some obvious challenges—pose a grave danger not only for Ukraine, but for the West as such. In that context, what might be the potential consequences of such a rapprochement, especially in a situation of a major trade and economic escalation led by the increasingly assertive US?

China's economy already today faces structural challenges, including weak domestic demand. The recently announced monetary stimulus has been introduced as a response. At the same time, a major confrontation between China and the US in the South Sea—one of the scenario's assumptions being a full-scale war over Taiwan and a simultaneous support of Russia—will ultimately and inevitably result in massive sanctions and yet another round of trade wars.

Even though based on financial assumptions, it is highly unlikely⁴ that China would initiate a full-scale war against Taiwan, risking military confrontation with the West, which would be highly likely to cause severe disruptions to China's economy. In that context, the EU needs to look for the right response to the shifting geopolitical and economic landscape to preserve its long-term resilience and global influence. At the same time, the EU must recognize that a weaker Chinese economy leads to a less robust political alliance between Russia and China.

² Metaculus. (2025). *Will China launch a full-scale invasion of Taiwan by the following years?* <https://www.metaculus.com/questions/11480/chinese-invasion-of-taiwan/>

³ Blackwill, R. D., & Fontaine, R. (2024, December 12). *No Limits? The China-Russia Relationship and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/report/no-limits-china-russia-relationship-and-us-foreign-policy>

⁴ Shumanov, M. (2025, January 14). China's choice: Balancing economic priorities and geopolitical manoeuvres in a Sino-Russian alliance. *New Eastern Europe*. <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2025/01/14/chinas-choice-balancing-economic-priorities-and-geopolitical-manoevres-in-a-sino-russian-alliance/>

As a highly open economy and the second-largest exporter in the world, the EU is—indeed—vulnerable to potential disruptions caused by a trade war, especially in case the tariffs are imposed on its goods. However, the US relies more on goods from the European Union than the EU does on those from the US (18.3% vs. 6.7%). Therefore, the EU finds itself in a preferential position here, especially when having an EU-unified position on trade issues. As a general rule, the smaller the economy, the more open it is and the more vulnerable it is to external shocks. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain a unified stance. Moreover, the EU can leverage the momentum to reduce its dependence on the US and/or China and focus on its EU-wide industrial policies.

Trade fragmentation also contributes to the emergence of the so-called “connector countries”. A “connector country” is a country that serves as a bridge between US-China blocks. Both China and the US increased their trade with such countries, thus changing the global trade flows and landscape. Europe has not seen a substantial increase in trade with those countries yet. Moreover, a significant portion of those countries are suppliers of critical raw materials necessary for the green transition. Europe [could become](#)⁵ a “connector area” by leveraging EU interdependence and its unique blend of innovation and production across the union. However, there are challenges: to do so, the EU has to overcome internal trade barriers and deepen the capital market, as the [Draghi report](#)⁶ advocates.

Additionally, some problems relevant to the Chinese economy apply to the EU too, such as low private consumption, limited private investments (paired with high savings), a low appetite for risk, or growing rivalry with the US. In addition to that, productivity is stagnant (and declining in some countries), budget deficits are at all-time highs, the union’s major economies are undergoing a political crisis, and some are facing economic crises with EU-level structural imbalances on top. There is an evident lack of strategic vision, leadership, and communication breakdowns, all of which undermine the EU’s ability to respond effectively to the shifting global dynamics.

Recommendations

Exploiting economic vulnerability and internal weaknesses might be a successful strategy, even when dealing with large economies. Therefore, leveraging Russia’s dependence on countries like China, the Central Asian nations, India, Hong Kong, South Africa, Turkey, the UAE, Vietnam, and others can be a good strategy to enhance the sanctions regime and other punitive measures. This would not only contribute to

⁵ de Bruce, É., & Tschanz, P.-A. (2024, December 6). *Fragmentation and “connector countries”: Is Europe being bypassed?* (Eco Notepad). Banque de France. <https://www.banque-france.fr/en/publications-and-statistics/publications/fragmentation-and-connector-countries-europe-being-bypassed>

⁶ Draghi, M. (2024). *The future of European competitiveness*. European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead_en

Europe's security by weakening Russia's ability to sustain its geopolitical ambitions but also enhance alliances with emerging economies, offering them alternative partnerships that do not involve Russian influence.

Although a Chinese invasion of Taiwan remains an unlikely scenario, the absence of stability in the Indo-Pacific region and the South China Sea poses significant risks to the EU's economic security, particularly in the semiconductor sector, and to global trade. To safeguard its interests, the EU must prioritize strong relationships with key regional partners like Japan and South Korea while clearly communicating a unified stance. Equally important is fostering ties with "connector countries," such as Thailand and Indonesia, both of which have recently started their OECD accession process. These relationships are critical to ensuring access to markets rich in critical raw materials and adapting to a shifting global trade landscape. Moreover, as global uncertainties persist and the EU faces low economic growth and low returns, EU investors may increasingly seek opportunities in connector countries like Indonesia, Mexico, and Vietnam. Nurturing strong partnerships with nations where EU businesses operate would contribute to a predictable political and economic landscape in these countries, protecting investments and fostering mutual growth.

It should be remembered that any rise of a tariff or a trade war leads to negative domestic macroeconomic consequences, including additional inflationary pressure. Therefore, Europe should continue its adherence to the WTO rules. Studies indicate that, in the medium term, tariff increases lead to substantial and measurable declines in domestic output and productivity. Additionally, they contribute to higher unemployment, increased inequality, and real exchange rate appreciation, while having only minor impacts on the trade balance.⁷ Thus, addressing the structural problems within EU member countries' economies and investing in the Capital Market Union rather than merely addressing symptoms through trade wars is crucial.

Europe should focus more on internal economic policy, capital markets development and leveraging high private savings, reviving productivity growth. A recent paper by Andre, Gal, and Schief⁸ presents a list of useful suggestions.⁹ A strong

⁷ Furceri, D., Hannan, S. A., Ostry, J. D., & Rose, A. K. (2019). *Macroeconomic consequences of tariffs* (IMF working paper WP/19/9). International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2019/01/15/Macroeconomic-Consequences-of-Tariffs-46469>

⁸ André, C., Gal, P., & Schief, M. (2024). *Enhancing productivity and growth in an ageing society: Key mechanisms and policy options* (OECD Economics Department working papers, No. 1807). <https://doi.org/10.1787/605b0787-en>

⁹ Similarly, the political agenda in the EU is being driven by the Draghi report on competitiveness (Draghi, M. (2024). *The future of European competitiveness*. European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead_en)

communication strategy would enhance the social acceptability of the reforms¹⁰ and contribute to the reduction of the level of uncertainty while also bolstering private demand and investments rather than savings, particularly if appropriate infrastructure is put in place to support the efforts. Smart economic policies targeting productivity growth and increasing funding for technological self-reliance coupled with a space for dialogue with the private sector will strengthen firms' competitiveness, enhance the resilience of the EU economy, ensure the availability of funds to support Ukraine while contributing to the EU's sustainable economic development and prosperity and preserve its global influence.

¹⁰ IMF Research Department (2024, October). Understanding the social acceptability of structural reforms. In *World economic outlook*. International Monetary Fund.
<https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9798400281150/CH003.xml>

Chechnya: Risks of Destabilization and Impact on the European Union

Forecasters of the Czech Priorities judge that there is an **18% probability** of Chechnya claiming independence before 2031. See Attachment for more details.

The inclusion of Chechnya as a scenario in this Impact Study is rooted in its presence in the original *“Russia 2030 Futures”* publication as well as [an article](#)¹¹ published in the *New Eastern Europe*. This follow-up builds on that foundation by examining Chechnya’s significance through the lens of European security and migration challenges. The original publication in its essence focused on the interplay between the Moscow center and Chechnya (periphery) during the period after Putin’s departure from power, which was followed by a renewed and intensified struggle for separation from the Russian Federation, including when benefitting from support from external actors.

By focusing on Chechnya, the study underscores how localized events can cascade across the EU’s borders, demanding a robust and coordinated response. Its relevance is further amplified by the EU’s need to address the long-term implications of instability in the North Caucasus, which remains a vital yet underexamined aspect of Russia-EU relations.

Chechnya’s current stability rests on the personal bond between Ramzan Kadyrov and Vladimir Putin, with Kadyrov relying on financial and political support from the Kremlin to maintain internal control. Any change in this dynamic, whether due to political shifts or leadership changes, could trigger a crisis in particular in Chechnya. This breakdown would lead to significant security challenges, weakening Russia’s hold over the North Caucasus and creating vulnerabilities that impact regional stability.

Kadyrov has used a combination of nationalism, religious authority, and personal loyalty to keep dissent under control. However, his potential exit could reignite deep-seated ethno-nationalist sentiments rooted in historical traumas, such as deportations and past wars. A return of nationalist or Islamist movements could disrupt Chechnya’s relationship with Moscow, creating spillover effects for Europe, especially through increased security risks and migratory pressure.

The Chechen diaspora in the EU countries remains vulnerable to radicalization due to social marginalization and complex integration challenges. European policymakers must focus on the unique cultural and political needs of Chechen communities, supporting integration efforts to mitigate security risks and foster a positive diaspora role in Europe.

Chechnya’s instability would bring migration and integration issues to the forefront for the EU, adding pressure to asylum systems and increasing the need for a

¹¹ Romanovsky, E. (2024, December 15). Chechnya’s instability: Implications for Russia and the EU. *New Eastern Europe*. <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/12/15/chechnyas-instability-implications-for-russia-and-the-eu/>

coordinated security response. The presence of an active Chechen diaspora within the EU further amplifies the importance of proactive engagement and tailored policies. This is particularly relevant given that each EU country addresses the integration of communities, including the Chechen diaspora, individually. There is no pan-European approach to migrant integration, which is undermining the internal cohesion of the Union. Furthermore, the EU lacks a unified stance toward the country of origin—Russia—which is a primary source of Chechen migration to Europe, which necessarily limits the scope of European ambitions vis-à-vis Russia. A region-specific strategy within a comprehensive EU framework is needed, as certain Russian regions are not only migration sources but also involve human rights concerns linked to national and religious minorities.

However, the EU does not yet have targeted tools nor a cohesive discourse or presence in these parts of Russia. This selective focus on human rights issues weakens the EU's image as a global defender of democracy and human rights, undermining its credibility. By overlooking opportunities to engage in regions where Moscow's influence is weaker, the EU forfeits a chance to present its model as more appealing and relevant to local populations.

Recommendations

The EU should develop targeted programs for the integration of Chechen communities, focusing on educational, employment, and cultural initiatives to foster cohesion and reduce radicalization risks. Diplomatic efforts and economic support, particularly for educational and infrastructure development, can help mitigate the drivers of instability in Chechnya. This is both true for the EU itself as well as for the longer-term future related to Russia, which might bring unexpected outcomes for the years to come.

The EU should adopt a long-term approach to the North Caucasus, becoming a long-term player in the region, while paying attention to the development of Russian regions based on the geopolitical benefits for the EU, as well as presence in the regions of Russia as a concept, idea, and space with its particular values, accounting for the potential for ethno-nationalist resurgence and regional security concerns. This strategy should also acknowledge the position of Georgia, Turkey, or the Gulf states, which play an important role in the region, and, wherever relevant and productive, enter into dialogues with them.

At the same time, this strategy might be a pioneer of a more consistent approach towards the Russian regions, not only in the North Caucasus but also in the Far East and other provinces. These issues deserve more attention, as the change in Russia might come not from the center but from the peripheries.

Russian Stalemate: Consequences of Ukraine's Success

Forecasters of the Czech Priorities judge that there is a **15% probability** of Ukraine joining the EU before 2031. See Attachment for more details.

In this scenario, the eventual peace treaty between Ukraine and Russia will constitute the end of the active phase of war and the return of the borders to their pre-2014 or pre-2022 condition. The victory will be declared for Ukraine (both in Ukraine and the EU), while Russia will be looking for ways to justify this outcome and spin the narrative to not be seen as a loser.

This scenario is strongly determined by whether the West shows high-level determination to keep supporting Ukraine in the years to come. The West will have to overcome multiple challenges to its resilience and security with a new Transatlantic consensus in order to help Ukraine to overcome and gradually win the war for its own territory. This will also require neutralizing the support that Russia gets from China and its other allies, including North Korea and Iran.

Speaking about the concrete impact of this scenario on the EU beyond building up resilience and resistance to the Russian pressure, it can be expected that the European Union would be most likely divided on if to continue demanding the punishment of the high-level war criminals, or return back to the *business as usual*, which presents one of the strategic dilemmas for the West as well as the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in particular, which has been traditionally standing in the hawkish camp over the past several decades, led primarily by Poland or the Baltics.

At the same time, another line of argument would be present by the EU's engagement in internal Russian matters while looking for allies and elites closer to its view on the future of Russia but also of the wider European continent, including in the security realm. This would, necessarily, lead to the EU's meddling in the chaotic Russian internal affairs and partnering with pro-Western and anti-Putin camps while also investing resources in restoring civil society, independent media, or small and medium businesses to counterbalance the interests of the hawkish part of the Kremlin's establishment and decrease their control and leverage.

While certainly not without risk, this might pose an opportunity to expand the space for voices critical towards the Kremlin inside (and outside) of Russia as well as create more problems for Putin's leadership at home, which can benefit the Ukrainian defenders as well as the wider West in its defense and deterrence posture.

Recommendations

What this approach requires is certainly a high level of unity within the EU and close coordination between the EU members and institutions. This is not only needed for making Ukraine's support sustainable in the mid- to long-term future but also for creating and pursuing a united strategy towards Russia, which albeit weakened would still pose a threat to the neighboring countries under Putin's leadership.

Concurrently, new tools and instruments are needed to increase the level of engagement with the pro-EU and Western part of Russian society as well as a more comprehensive strategy towards the Russian pro-democracy opposition, civil society, and independent media, which might in such cases represent a valuable ally in resourcing the pro-Western camp inside of Russia.

Finally, a more robust sanction policy, good monitoring, and dutiful differentiation inside the Russian elite groups are also needed to uplift the more pro-Western “party” and punish people who would remain in Putin's camp. A big question lies over the final goal of requesting the extradition of Putin and a smaller part of the Kremlin's elite directly responsible for the war efforts to face international justice, which could potentially be dividing for international partners of Russia as well as when perceived from the domestic and societal angles and threaten the stability of the gradually changing political reality inside of the Russian Federation. Especially since some of the hawks in the EU are not ready to support the international justice bodies in other cases, including those related to Israel and Palestine.

The “Russkiy Mir” and Belarus: Potential Scenarios and the Impact on the EU

Forecasters of the Czech Priorities judge that there is a **28% probability** that at least a part of Belarus will be either annexed or incorporated into the Russian Federation before 2031. See Attachment for more details.

The Belarus scenario is integral to this Impact Study, as it was a cornerstone of the original *“Russia 2030 Futures”* publication. Its inclusion highlights Belarus’s critical role as both a regional pivot and a focal point in Russia’s geopolitical strategy. By examining this scenario, the study explores how heightened integration between Russia and Belarus under the Union State framework could reshape the EU’s eastern border and create a new set of challenges for European security and cohesion. Belarus serves as a test case for understanding Moscow’s capacity to project influence and assert control, making it a vital part of any strategic assessment concerning the EU’s neighborhood.

In the event of Alexander Lukashenko’s departure (for whichever reason), Russia may assert full control over Belarus by integrating it more deeply into the Union State structure. Such a scenario would enable Moscow to claim a geopolitical victory, symbolizing the retention of its influence in the post-Soviet space connected to a great power position. This consolidation under the “Russkiy Mir” ideology would serve both to satisfy domestic demands for great-power status and to create a forward base for exerting pressure on the EU. Although the high-ranking parties deny a scenario, in which Russia and Belarus would merge into one state, active integration processes, as well as the Kremlin’s imperial appetites, may indicate otherwise.

With heightened tensions between Russia and the West, Moscow could use its influence over Belarus as leverage, potentially offering (in)stability in Belarus as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the West on Ukraine. In that respect, the Kremlin has powerful tokens to play, including the presence of its army as well as nuclear warheads on the Belarusian territory. For the EU, this presents a critical dilemma: the choice between pursuing a path of limited engagement with Russia to reduce instability or doubling down on a strategy of deterrence and containment.

By absorbing Belarus into its sphere, Russia would have greater military and intelligence access directly bordering the EU’s eastern flank. This expanded presence would allow Moscow to project power and influence, posing security risks to neighboring EU and NATO member states. For the CEE states, the Russian absorption of Belarus would deepen security fears, especially in Poland and the Baltic states, where memories of Russian influence remain sensitive. There is a risk that a hardened EU stance could exacerbate divisions among its members, while hesitation might undermine the EU’s credibility in supporting its Eastern partners.

This scenario threatens the EU's unity and stability, particularly for the CEE. Increased Russian control over Belarus could intensify pressures on the EU's eastern border, including in the area of migration,¹² and challenge both the EU solidarity and NATO's response capacity. The election of Trump as the US President could further reduce America's role in the region. Moreover, the EU faces the difficult balance of managing this risk without conceding strategic ground to Moscow or alienating key allies in the region.

Recommendations

The EU and NATO should reinforce a united front on their eastern flank. Increasing military presence and boosting defense funding in these areas will serve as effective deterrents, protecting against potential Russian incursions.

The EU should lead efforts to shape a Transatlantic dialogue on Russia's future role, not only depending on the leadership of the USA and emphasizing the need for a unified approach that balances diplomatic engagement with robust deterrence.

The EU should work more closely with its Eastern neighbors (especially those under Russian influence), including the democratic forces of Belarus, promoting political and economic resilience through integration programs that reduce their dependence on Russia and strengthen their ties to the EU.

Special attention should be paid to the situation in Belarus, which remains highly volatile based on the personalized regime of Lukashenko, which does not have his continuity secured in the years to come and can fall victim to the pressure of Russia. Thus, it is worth investing in the democratic forces of Belarus as well as the civil society and independent media outlets, which promote critical thinking, resilience and state sovereignty, which the Kremlin might further try to undermine, even more than it is already today.

¹² Ashurkevich, T. (2025). Inside Belarus' secret program to undermine the EU. *Politico Europe*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/alexander-lukashenko-belarus-secret-program-to-undermine-the-eu/>

General Conclusions and Recommendations

The *Impact Study* builds on the original “*Russia 2030 Futures*” publication, aiming to refine and expand its analysis in light of recent geopolitical shifts and developments. Since the original study’s release in September 2024, the reelection of Donald Trump to the White House and the intensification of peace discussions regarding Ukraine have further complicated the landscape of EU-Russia relations. These changes underscore the importance of revisiting and adapting the initial scenarios to better address the evolving challenges and opportunities for the EU.

More generally, this study not only reflects critically on the original publication but also tailors its findings to provide actionable insights for EU policy-makers. By focusing on the specific implications of each scenario for the EU, it offers a more precise and practical roadmap to mitigate risks and capitalize on potential opportunities. The inclusion of scenario-specific recommendations ensures that decision-makers are equipped to respond effectively to the diverse outcomes that Russia’s future might present. Finally, by adding the percentage points to each of the scenarios, the foreign policy and security community can easily differentiate among different options and consider the urgency with which it is necessary to respond to given issues.

Beyond addressing the individual trajectories of Russia, the study also emphasizes overarching recommendations for EU policy. These general measures aim to reinforce the EU’s strategic position, enhance its resilience, and ensure it can navigate any scenario that might arise. By integrating these actions into its broader framework, the EU can safeguard its security, uphold its values, and strengthen its influence both within its borders and in its external relations.

General Recommendations for the EU

1. Support for Ukraine must be unwavering

The EU’s support for Ukraine remains pivotal, not only for the defense of European security but also as a demonstration of its commitment to democratic values. Despite signs of war fatigue in Russian society, incremental Russian victories could alter public sentiment, making sustained EU and US support for Ukraine all the more critical. Ukraine serves as a vital line of defense for the EU. Policy-makers must prioritize this support, guaranteeing its continuity across electoral cycles and political transitions in member states.

2. Engage with Russia’s partner countries to leverage influence

Russia’s economic model increasingly relies on partnerships with countries like China, India, Turkey, and the UAE, as well as Central Asian states. Many of these nations facilitate Russia’s evasion of sanctions through private firms and dual-use goods. The EU must leverage this interdependence by engaging in diplomatic dialogue and, where necessary, applying secondary sanctions. This approach could prove more effective than escalating direct sanctions, pressuring Russia’s partners to align with international norms.

3. Encourage Russian elite divergences through targeted policies

Fostering divisions within Russia's ruling elite is a strategic priority for the EU. By identifying tensions between key factions—such as technocrats prioritizing economic stability and security officials with vested interests in the continuation of the war—the EU can amplify internal disagreements. Rethinking sanctions policies to exert targeted pressure on the “party of war” while offering incentives to pragmatists could deepen these fractures, encouraging realignments that weaken the Kremlin's cohesion and decision-making capacity.

4. Strengthen the EU's unity and appeal

The EU must remain a strong, united, and attractive force in global politics. In addition to traditional challenges like security, climate change, and economic competitiveness, the Union must assert its leadership as a global advocate for democracy, human rights, and freedom. This requires institutional reforms and a proactive approach to emerging challenges, including the integration of migrants and engagement with post-Soviet diasporas. The EU's ability to position itself as a counterweight to authoritarian models like Russia's depends on its capacity to embody the values it seeks to promote. Along the same lines, any attempt to re-engage with Russia should be done based on the predefined set of conditions and red lines that should first be met before any kind of opening might take place.

5. Promote inclusive policies and minority engagement

The EU should actively support pro-democratic actors and foster inclusion for social, religious, and national minorities. Minority leaders aligned with European values can serve as key advocates for the EU's model, both within member states and in external relations. By investing in societal inclusivity, integration programs and minimizing the impact of political extremes, the EU can strengthen its internal cohesion while extending its influence beyond its borders.

Final Reflection: A Stronger EU for a Complex Future

The scenarios explored in this study highlight the complex interplay between Russia's trajectory and the EU's ability to respond effectively. Whether addressing instability in Chechnya, Belarus's deeper integration into Russia, or broader systemic challenges, the EU must adopt a proactive, efficient, and forward-looking strategic stance.

By maintaining unwavering support for Ukraine, leveraging influence over Russia's partners, fostering dialogue with Russian technocrats, and strengthening its unity and values, the EU can navigate these uncertain times with confidence. The pursuit of resilience, security, and democratic principles must remain at the core of its approach, ensuring that the European Union continues to serve as a beacon of stability and hope in a rapidly changing world.

About Authors

Pavel Havlicek is a Research Fellow at the Association for International Affairs (AMO) and mentors the project “[Russia 2030 Futures Enhanced](#)” at Ideas for Russia. His research focus is on Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine and Russia, and the Eastern Partnership. He also deals with questions of security, disinformation, and strategic communication, as well as democratization and civil society support in the CEE and post-Soviet space.

Evgeny Romanovsky holds an MA in Political Science from the University of Vienna and is currently a PhD student at Charles University in Prague. His current task within his Ideas for Russia (IFR) research internship is to analyze one of the key scenarios of the IFR project “Russia 2030 Futures Enhanced” under the guidance of Pavel Havlicek.

Marta Shumanov is an economist and an intern of the Ideas for Russia Labs at the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom. Within her IFR research internship, she analyzes one of the key scenarios for “Russia 2030 Futures Enhanced”. Her research focuses on macroeconomic resilience in fragile contexts amid changing geopolitical landscapes.

Morgan Braun is a social researcher and an intern of the Ideas for Russia Labs at the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom. Their current focus within the IFR Labs is to analyze one of the key scenarios for the project “Russia 2030 Futures Enhanced”.

[Ideas for Russia](#) is a research initiative co-founded by the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom in partnership with the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University and the Institute for International Relations Prague. The initiative establishes an academic network that is aimed at producing empirical scholarly insights on current and future trends in Russian society, politics, and economy. It fosters collaborative projects of reputable Russia scholars, including Russian researchers at risk. It also supports the students, interested in studying contemporary Russia, through the Ideas for Russia Labs internship program.

[Czech Priorities, z.ú.](#), is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization specializing in the public sector. Our mission is to support the Czech public administration in systematically and effectively using all available evidence-based knowledge in its decision-making—also known as evidence-informed policymaking. We conduct analytical work and develop and promote innovative methods for connecting the scientific, academic, and public sectors, as well as the non-profit sector and civil society. Additionally, we focus on analyzing future trends and prioritizing measures based on rigorous cost-benefit calculations.

All opinions expressed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or views of their respective institutions, the Ideas for Russia initiative, or the Boris Nemtsov Foundation for Freedom.

Attachment

Future Scenarios Concerning the Russian Federation – Forecasting Report by Czech Priorities

<https://nemtsofund.org/cp/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Future-scenarios-concerning-the-Russian-Federation-Czech-Priorities.pdf>