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***Discussion on Russia during panel debate on
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There is a history of EU-Russia relations which facilitated President Putin's moves.

EU Russia relations have been going wrong for years, and for sure since 2007, when the ten year partnership agreement expired.

The Russian President has been following a zero sum game. This logic is based on the assumption that Russia is safe only if everybody else is not safe. The EU did not do enough to break this logic.

For years, the US agenda on Russia differed from the one of the EU. The US strategy was linked to global challenges like disarmament, Iran or Afghanistan. Our policy had been focused rather on bilateral trade related issues.

The EU did not manage, in spite of initial efforts to use Kaliningrad as a pilot for a new form of relations with Russia.

We seemed to ignore what was clear from the very beginning, namely that the Ukraine is absolutely crucial for a politically and economically relevant Eurasian Union whose establishment was a precondition for Putin's readiness to start negotiations with the EU.

The EU did not show any sensibility towards Russia when it comes to visa liberalization. Our line on it the line has been continuously negative.

Also, on energy, there was a total lack of understanding on our side of the Gazprom strategy on long term contracts. They needed them to get the highest possible prices to get means for modernization investment.

President Putin was open only to negotiations or cooperation in areas which would directly or indirectly make him strong, like visa facilitation or energy. The EU did not welcome the Russia style of doing international politics, based only on the basis of deal making.

But the EU also lacked leadership on Russia. Individual states had very clearly different interests and priorities. Neither the Weimar triangle nor the Visegrad Four have taken the lead.

As a result we failed completely to transform Russia into a liberal democracy. Quite the contrary, we moved from strategic partnership to strategic confrontation.

It is legitimate to ask whether when Mr Putin moved on Ukraine the Union had any other option than sanctions. Sanctions aimed at changing Mr Putin, without much effect however.

Could we move faster?

The Minsk summit was totally compromised by Russia from the very beginning. Actually, it will be rather effective as a platform for solution seeking.

Today it is rather obvious that the EU traditional approach aiming at giving Mr Putin a face saving exit option will not do the trick.

He will insist on a federal solution for Ukraine as opposed to the EU one of decentralization, which would leave the territorial control to the Ukraine.

There is no more space for diplomatic efforts to accommodate Russia. On the other hand however, the appetite for conflict with Russia is also rather limited in the EU.

Some experts are suggesting to reach out to China to get some pressure on Russia from there. However, after the good deal on energy, it is rather unlikely to expect such an attitude from the Chinese leadership.

Military support for Ukraine has been rejected as an option so what is left is to allow the Ukraine to surrender.

Now, all we can do is to expect from the new High Representative a new coherent strategy for Russia, one that would allow us to move from strategic confrontation to strategic cooperation, as a partnership seems too far from a possible reality.

Maybe this Russian test offers Europe a chance to start a truly common foreign and security policy. We managed so far to build a relatively shared approach to Mr Putin's policy. We must not allow ourselves to go back to twenty eight national positions.