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The EU and Russia in 2008: In Search of New Approaches
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I think we have seen how difficult it has been, especially for the EU member-states to agree, to start the negotiations with Russia, and to agree on a mandate that should be on the table and what topics definitely should be discussed. Most certainly, I think that the EU common foreign and security policy stays in a kindergarden, yet this is one of the biggest challenges for the EU ahead. We can say that the EU will define the foreign policy positions, though the negotiations with Russia. Certainly during last four to five years we have seen maturing number of different topics and issues which are grown into a problems between the EU and Russia; we have more than forty pages with different issues, topics and problems, from detailed ones to general ones, waiting for some sort of solution. And here I am maybe pessimistic in the sense that these negotiations could bring us to some sort of solutions of those issues. Maybe some of them may be agreed between Brussels and all the member-states and Russia. Most generally, I agree with Mrs. Khakamada in the sense that most likely this document will be some sort of a temporary document for defining the state of affairs between Russia and the EU, trying to solve some economic issues or problems. But we have had this term - 'strategic partnership with Russia' - already for more than ten years. Last time we had negotiations on the last PCA, they started in 1994 and were concluded in 1997. Of course, since that time the EU is completely different by size and by interests the countries share and have in today's EU. Generally speaking, of course, representing a small country which is a neighbour to Russia, a country which has quite a long list of questions that we have not been able to solve either on bilateral level or through mechanisms or tools of the EU-Russia relations, I dearly doubt that any sort of significant or long-lasting strategic partnership is possible if we do not read the questions which could be described a sort of common understanding about values. Here I think is very important to start a sort of discussion about Russia-EU relations. During the last ten years we have seen that sometimes economic interests or general interest, maybe somehow also security interest have overplayed the question of common values. This is something we really share in a way that all the EU member-states together with Russia belong to another organization, the Council of Europe, which is basically running and supporting, and asking member-states to share the responsibilities each member-states of the Council of Europe has undertaken. So, this way I do not think that we should just leave aside the idea of talking seriously about the problem, the problem, which is the widening of the value-gap between the member-states of Europe and Russia. And this widening of this value-gap has been significantly seen during the last eight years, especially during the presidency of Mr. Putin it has brought us to very tense relations between Russia and its neighbors. At this point, of course, especially talking about Russia-Ukraine and Russia-Georgia relations, these issues certainly also will certainly influence the negotiations of the next PCA and the relations between the EU and Russia.

Summing up, I would like to say that, like I said, this will also be a challenge for Europe, but these negotiations will be also a challenge for Russia, because suddenly Russia needs Europe, its markets and economic relations with the European member-states. I think that the last several years, maybe less than two or three years the EU has shown that sort of the common approach of the topic of how to deal with Russia, and it has been more than visible. I think that suddenly the interest of Russia is to keep Europe divided to run the business with the big member-states, but I think that this is certainly the tactics, which maybe does not give any results anymore. At least the process, which is going on in Europe, the Lisbon treaty ratification process will lead us to more sort of united position, at least to a will of the EU member-states to act more united and with one voice on issues of foreign policy. I think that these negotiations will last the next two or three years and they will show actually a test for Europe. But, as I said, it will be a test for Russia as well to show the Russian new presidency, the power of principles and the rule of law.