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## **VERSLAG VAN EEN RONDETAfelGESPReK**

Vastgesteld 7 april 2020

De vaste commissie voor Buitenlandse Zaken heeft op 12 februari 2020 gesprekken gevoerd over:

- **de brief van de Minister van Buitenlandse Zaken d.d. 22 december 2019 inzake uitvoering van de gewijzigde motie van de leden Stoffer en Verhoeven over opstellen van een Ruslandstrategie (Kamerstuk 35 373, nr. 1).**

Van deze gesprekken brengt de commissie bijgaand geredigeerd woordelijk verslag uit.

De voorzitter van de commissie,  
Pia Dijkstra

De griffier van de commissie,  
Van Toor

**Voorzitter: Pia Dijkstra**  
**Griffier: Konings**

Aanwezig zijn zes leden der Kamer, te weten: Pia Dijkstra, Karabulut, Koopmans, Krol, Van Ojik en Sjoerdsma.

Aanvang 14.04 uur.

**De voorzitter:**

Goedemiddag, zeg ik maar even ook tegen de mensen op de publieke tribune. Van harte welkom. Ik heet de collega's welkom voor deze ronde tafel over de betrekkingen met Rusland.

I will continue in English. I would like to especially welcome the experts who came from abroad to participate in this afternoon's meeting. I have to start by saying that unfortunately, our colleague Mr De Roon, who was involved with the preparations of this meeting, cannot be present here today because he is not feeling well. And some of our colleagues will join us later, while others – Mr Koopmans for example – will have to leave early. You may know that this is how things go in parliament: everybody has three things to do at the same time.

However, we do appreciate it very much that you were prepared to come here to talk to us. On behalf of the standing committee on Foreign Affairs I thank you for making the journey to The Hague. I also thank you for sending in your position papers. Those are particularly important for the colleagues who are unable to attend this meeting today.

The committee organized this meeting in order to gather information and to exchange views about Russia. The members of the committee will use the information shared with us today as input for the debate on the Russia strategy that was presented by the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs in December last year. This debate is scheduled to take place on Monday, 20 April. The experts participating in today's round table were sent an English version of the strategy paper and have been able to take note of it. Today's round table consists of two sessions. The first focuses on geopolitical relations and the second on domestic developments and the human rights situation in Russia. In each session, our guest speakers will provide a brief introduction, following which the MPs can ask questions. I also invite the experts to respond to the introductions and comments of the other experts present here today, so that there can be a real exchange of ideas between you all. Please feel free to jump in at any time, because that is the best way to exchange views. This meeting will be in English because we have guests here from abroad, and the Parliamentary Reporting Department will make a transcript of this meeting. I suggest that we now start the first session.

**Session 1: Geopolitical relations**

- Mr Hannes Adomeit, Universität Kiel, Institut für Sicherheitspolitik
- Ms Kadri Liik, senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations
- Mr Stanislav Secieru, EU Institute for Strategic Studies

The **chairperson:**

I would first like to invite Mr Adomeit to give a brief introduction of approximately five minutes.

Mr **Adomeit:**

Thank you very much. My introduction will follow very closely the position paper that was distributed to all of you. It will comprise the following points. First an overview of the Russian aims in foreign policy. Second, the instruments that are used to achieve these objectives. Third, I will briefly sketch the two characteristics of what I consider to be the

current essence of Russian foreign policy. Then fourth, the evolutionary perspectives and fifth and last, but not least, how to respond to the current trends in Russian foreign policy.

With regard to the general aims, I briefly sum up the eight aims that I wrote down. The first and foremost aim in my view is really domestic. The main interest of the Kremlin is to maintain the current system, the Putin system, as it is. Domestic power is essential in my view and foreign policy is subordinated to this first goal. Second, and second most important, is the aim to maintain and possibly increase the Russian sphere of influence and to restore something like the former Soviet Union. This is, of course, not about reconstituting the former Soviet Union in a legal way, but in terms of influence and control within this self-declared sphere of influence, previously called the «Near Abroad» in Russia.

The third goal, I would say, is neutralizing Western threats. In my view, the main perceived dangers or threats to Russian security as perceived by the Russian power elite, are not military or political; they are primarily socio-economic and require, in the view of the Kremlin, a vigorous struggle against the so-called colour revolutions. In that sense, the European Union is perceived as a bigger threat than NATO. Therefore, it is required, among other things – number four – that the Western liberal democratic and rules-based international order be counteracted, by claiming that strong authoritarian systems like that of Russia, with so-called traditional values, are superior to what we find in the West. What they want, one could say, is to make the world safe for autocracy.

Number five is restoring Russia as a great power in world affairs. Putin and the Russian power elite still smart under the perceived «humiliation» of having, as is said, «lost the Cold War». An indication of that is the outcry, as you will probably remember, when former US-president Obama dared to call Russia a mere «regional power». This created quite an outcry in Moscow at the time at what was perceived as a humiliation, given the status of the country.

Number six is related to the previous one, namely to rule out a US-dominated unipolar world. In practice this means counteracting, limiting and frustrating American foreign policy and the foremost example of that is the Russian military intervention in Syria post 2011 or the military actions in September 2015. This in turn is related to number seven, namely weakening the West, which in essence means weakening NATO and the EU, and – above all – to separate the United States from Western Europe.

Another part of this is number eight, building close relations with China with the construction of what is called in both countries a «strategic partnership» which, again in both countries, is directed against the United States. From the Russian point of view the aim is to regionally prevent the extension of unwanted Chinese influence into the spheres of influence claimed by Moscow, notably of course in Central Asia.

So if these are the goals, what are the main instruments Russia is using to achieve these objectives? First and foremost – and this development has been in evidence quite clearly since the Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008 – that is the direct and indirect use of military power. It has three dimensions. The first and probably the most important one is at the super power level to maintain and improve nuclear strategic capabilities in relation to the United States. Secondly, the adoption in Europe of a threat posture, i.e. the build-up of armed forces in the western military districts of Russia. As you know, Russia still has about a million men under arms and the large-scale military manoeuvres that take place every year or every two years, Zapad, are part of this threat posture. Number three, also in areas beyond the immediate neighbourhood, Russia is attempting to build up its strength and its intervention capabilities. Again, Syria is one of the examples.

Other instruments, which are increasingly important, are propaganda, disinformation and destabilization campaigns in the West. One of the foremost examples of that is the concentration of all the various news channels and news operations under one head, namely Dimitry Kiselyov, and his agency that is responsible for many of these disinformation campaigns and for spreading the Russian narratives. He is a really shrewd anti-Western propagandist.

As you well know, extensive use is made of the internet for disinformation purposes, up to and including such well-known troll factories as the Internet Research Agency, which is lavishly financed. Of course there also is the phenomenon of cultivating relations with the individual Western parties and movements, as well as the intervention and destabilization and influencing campaigns in e.g. the Brexit campaign, in Catalonia or in the elections in the United States, but also in Germany and in France. Plus the cultivation of relations with people who, at present or in the past, are or were favourably inclined towards Russia. In Germany that would first and foremost be Gerhard Schröder, who is both on the board of directors of Gazprom and of Rosneft, which leaves him in fairly good shape financially.

The spreading of a sort of new narrative has become increasingly important with Putin stylizing himself as a history professor, presenting a so-called historical narrative that is entirely positive for Russia. This pertains particularly to World War II, up to and including the new phenomenon that Putin is now making one of the major victims of the war responsible for its outbreak, namely Poland. He went so far in this as to call the Polish ambassador seated in Berlin in 1939 «a bastard and an anti-Semitic swine». That is how far it has come with this narrative that the outbreak of World War II had nothing to do with the Nazi-Soviet pact, but that it was really the West and, of course, Poland who were responsible.

Now to two characteristics. When we step back and look at the essence of Russian policy, two things particularly strike me. One is that, in contrast to what one could have assumed after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev said that this was the last time that Russia had the ability to become a normal medium-sized European power, like Germany, like France, like Britain. But this is not what the Russian power elite wanted. They were aiming at parity and political equality with the United States. This was the programme set in motion by Putin, to make Russia a «velikaya derzhava», a great power again. That is very important, because this is the primary objective: to become a great power again, at the level of the United States.

The second observation is that when you look at what I consider the essence of Russian foreign policy, we are really getting back to the Brezhnev Era. The main instruments have become military power and, of course, oil and gas. These two instruments are major. Soft power is still important in the post-Soviet space, but not vis-à-vis the rest of the world, so to speak.

As for the evolutionary perspectives, two points seem to be important to me. Why is that the case? When looking at the 300, 400 years of Russian history, it always seems to be the same. Déjà vu. You get short periods of liberalisation, of pluralism, of democracy building, like most recently in the Gorbachev Era, with perestroika, with glasnost, with «demokrati-zatsiya» et cetera, et cetera. And then you get very long periods of regression and repression. It is rebuilding those three major pillars of Tsarist rule, namely autocracy, orthodoxy and what could now be called populism or «narodnost». That is basically the system in the people. I am almost finished.

**The chairperson:**

I know, Mr Adomeit, it is very good that you describe what it says in your position paper, but I am also keeping an eye on the clock. So if you could conclude your introduction very briefly, we would appreciate that.

**Mr Adomeit:**

I am at the end. I have outlined where we are at, what the state of affairs is. The question is: how should we respond? About this I can be very brief. I think it would be quite a mistake to abandon the sanctions regime. The only thing we can really do, is to apply what is covered by the term «strategic patience», because as things stand now, Western concessions and Western compromises vis-à-vis the Soviet area will be interpreted as Western weakness, which would be seen as a confirmation that the point of view and the policies conducted by Russia have been correct. Thank you.

**The chairperson:**

Thank you very much, Mr Adomeit. I would now like to give the floor to Ms Liik.

**Ms Liik:**

Thank you very much for inviting me. I am Kadri Liik from the European Council on Foreign Relations. I am sorry that I am the one who failed to send a position paper. I will give a short presentation in very broad terms and I will be happy to answer any questions afterwards. I understand that your aim is to think about bilateral relations between the Netherlands and Russia. I need to start with bad news for you. There is very little any European country can achieve bilaterally vis-à-vis Russia. The disagreement between Russia and Europe is normative and philosophical. It centres around fundamental questions of foreign policy. What is legitimate behaviour, what is not? What should be the driving force of international behaviour and what not? What should be the aim of it all? We have fundamentally different views. No European country has enough weight to say anything on these normative issues. Your fellow countryman, Commissioner Timmermans was very right when he said a few years ago at the Munich conference that Europe consists of small countries and the countries that have not yet understood that they are small. It is very true in the relations with Russia. Bilaterally, one can achieve nitty-gritty. Some trade deals, cultural exchange or consular things if needed. Yes, please. But when it comes to big things concerning the world order or European order, we cannot achieve anything at all bilaterally. Only as Europe. I think Europe is currently stuck in its relations with Russia, because we are lacking a conceptual framework. We had such a framework until, I would say, it was shattered in 2014. That framework was still rooted in 1989, the idealistic time when it was expected that Europe would come together and Russia would become part of that Europe, adopting our norms and values and gradually becoming integrated. For Russia, it stopped working earlier. Russia tried to signal it, because European norms were at odds with Russia's domestic arrangements. That made Russia feel discriminated in the European arena, because it was not a democracy like European countries. So, it was not treated as a European country and it permanently felt treated as unequal. Ultimately, Russia started disputing the whole western world view. Sometimes, let us admit it, they had a point, when it comes to humanitarian intervention and so forth, or Western policies in the Middle East. Some of Russia's criticism is justified. But nonetheless, Russia's dissatisfaction grew. But I think Europe only really woke up in 2014, when we saw that Russia has really moved very far away from what we thought our relationship was.

We do not have a new concept. We know that we cannot go back to what we had. I think that everyone in Europe knows that. But we do not know where we are going. Russia's own world view is centred around big countries. I would say, if we had our 1989 world view, Russia's is the 1945 world view, when the world was organized around big countries, like the big five. Russia is convening the big five meeting again at the time of the UN General Assembly. They would like the world to be divided into spheres of responsibility. It is not entirely cynical. It is not just about having a sphere of influence, but exactly about assuming responsibility, as they would say: big countries guiding their small puppets. They think that would make the world manageable. Otherwise, it is too chaotic. I do not think that world view can work either in the current era. It is not possible to have the sort of control over smaller countries that Russia wishes to have and that Russia wishes other countries to have. So I think Russia's conceptual framework is not going to work either. I think the uncertainty we face is going to stay with us for a long time, because inevitably, European-Russian relations are going to be rooted in the wider world order. That is in flux. We do not know where it goes. We do not know where the relations between America and China will end up and what will be the normative rules that guide the world. We do not know to what extent European rules and values will still have a say.

For Russia, it matters a great deal. As long as they thought that European rules are here to stay, they worked quite hard, though unsuccessfully to adapt to that. Now that they think that these rules are not there to stay, they see no point in agreeing with us on anything. I think our global influence is directly linked to how we manage to handle problems at home.

So, my three recommendations to you about what to do, are all about internal problems and external ones actually. Start at home. Solve your domestic problems, if you have any. Most of us have some. I am sure you have too. Bring in line your audiences, the wider public, with politicians and political elites. Try to create a common vision and political systems that work. The problems we are facing, are inevitable, because globalisation and democracy were bound to clash a little bit. But that needs to be solved. Liberal democracy needs to be adapted to the new era. That can only be done internally. That is the start of it. When we manage to do so, it adds weight to us in Russia's eyes as well.

Secondly, I think Europe needs to learn to do foreign policy in a world that is not adapting to our norms and values. Much of our foreign policy was about convergence. We were spreading our values to our neighbours, which would include Russia. Now we cannot do that anymore, because we cannot bind them, at least for the time being. One of my colleagues, Ivan Krastev, a board member, has suggested that Europe needs to turn from missionary into monastery. Instead of going out and selling our values to everyone, we need to keep them alive inside Europe. But «monastery» does not mean «isolation». I do not think it should be understood that way. The monastery is where wisdom is kept and openly available to people who want to come and learn. Powerful monasteries have played very powerful roles. So it is nothing to be ashamed of. If we walk around and try to impose our values on people who are not in the position to adapt to them, that does no good to us. But having said that, we should impose our signature on things where we can. I think that Europe can be a very powerful norm setter when it comes to issues such as data protection, trade and so forth. We should not try to play geopolitical games the way France is currently trying to do, but we could do other things. We have managed to dictate terms to Gazprom as well as to Google. That is not a bad start at all. This is something where we can use our leverage.

Finally, harmonize views on Russia inside Europe, because European countries are not on the same page when it comes to Russia. Our former

approaches have also been shattered. Earlier, some European countries wanted to change Russia, such as Germany and the Baltic States. They sort of hoped that Russia would become a democracy. They tried to work on it. The Baltic States used the sticks and Germany used the carrots of dialogue. It did not work. There have always been some countries that were more realistic, such as France and Italy, who think that Russia is what it is and that we need to deal with it as it is. But now we need to somehow bring these views in line. In my own talks, my message is very different and depends on where I speak. In the Baltic States and Sweden I would say: listen, 1989 is not going to come back. You should not impose the demands and requirements on Russia like you did back then. That is outdated. Think of where we go from here and adapt your goals. In France, I say that geopolitical deal-making with Russia does not work. And that is visible in Moscow. I mean, Russia is not interested in a geopolitical deal with president Macron, because that is not what they need either. They might need a relationship with Europe. So, Germany probably gets it by and large right, but they are paralysed because of their domestic situation.

So I think a small, outlooking country like the Netherlands is actually in a good position to facilitate these intra-European exchanges about Russia and about what Europe should do with Russia. That would be of help in the future. But I do not think we should expect any quick progress.

**The chairperson:**

Thank you very much. I would like to give the floor to Mr Secrieru.

**Mr Secrieru:**

Thank you. It is a tough task to follow in the footsteps of my two excellent colleagues and their presentations. They referred to many things that resonate with what I have put in my paper. First, I would like to thank you for the invitation to address such a topical issue as the EU-Russia relations. As you know, the EUISS has a mandate to provide expertise and analysis to EU institutions and EU Member States. So basically, I am fulfilling my mandate today, sitting before you. As we do this, we try to foster a joint assessment of security threats and challenges, but also opportunities for the European Union. We try to push for joint responses to foreign policy and security challenges. Exactly from this angle I am looking at the EU-Russia relations.

I am pushing for and advocating a common EU approach. Unity is a EU lever and it is to its advantage in its relations with Russia. It needs to be preserved and strengthened. It is even more important now that the age when rules dictated the international relations is slowly giving way to the age of power politics. We need to stay united in this transitional period. I would like to make three brief points. The first one is that it is no secret that the EU-Russia relations are at the lowest level in the last decade. It is bad, but there are also some good things to learn from this situation. The first lesson we can draw from the situation in which we are, is that we tried to change Russia incrementally, but over the last decade we have discovered that Russia is trying to test our political systems and our economic systems as well.

The second lesson is that we were thinking that Russia has a problem with NATO in the eastern neighbourhood, but it is very clear today that they have a problem with the EU presence in the eastern neighbourhood as well, when we exercise our legitimate right to trade and have more people-to-people contacts with our eastern neighbours.

The third lesson is that there was the assumption in the EU that things might not work well in its relationship with Russia in the common neighbourhood. But at least, we can work in the other regions, so to say. But what we discovered over the last decade is that Russian foreign policy was more combative in the Western Balkans, in Africa, undercutting

European interests actually. We have not seen a lot of room for cooperation in other regions.

The last lesson is that we thought about interdependence only in benign terms, but during the last decade we have discovered that there is a dark side to interdependence as well, when some players are trying to leverage energy links or other economic levers against us.

All these lessons and developments in the EU-Russia relations lead to the sort of EU-Russia strategic stalemate. It is characterized by the fact that we are trying to manage these agreements rather than to push for new agreements. We are trying to implement damage limitation, rather than to have a forward looking approach in bilateral relations. Basically, we are trying to safeguard what has been achieved during the last twenty or thirty years, rather than to set up new tasks and goals for our bilateral relationship.

My third and last point. It is obvious that this is not how we imagined the EU-Russia relations in the early 1990s. As a result, inside Europe a debate is going on about how to proceed forward. There are two schools of thought. One is: let us try and have another outreach towards Russia. Let us try again. I think that this approach is vulnerable, because if there is no reciprocity, it is not going to work. If we have only a unilateral outreach towards Russia, it might put us in a much weaker negotiating position with Russia.

The second school of thought on how to proceed is that in this era of strategic ambiguity and not knowing where Russia is moving, it is better to stay united and to invest in the functional unity, not in the declarative unity. It is important that the Netherlands received the support from allies after the MH17 tragedy. Many smaller states in the EU realise how important it is to have allies behind you when you are in such a crisis situation.

The second pillar is: let us keep constraining Russian malign behaviour inside Europe. But also, let us help neighbours to build immunity against Russian destabilization tactics. The EU will increasingly need to act as a mediating power. One good example are the recent talks mediated by the EU between Ukraine and Russia. In order to be successful as a mediating power and in preventing crises, the EU would need to have a stronger position. In this particular case, the EU Member States stored enough gas to resist any kind of crisis in January 2020. The EU also needs to have a coherent communication strategy. Gazprom and Russia knew what were the red lines.

Obviously, there is an element of dialogue and engagement. We have to be very realistic in this respect and to scale down our expectations. We have to have a dialogue, in order to understand how Russia thinks and adapts its arguments, and to understand how Russia views the European Union policies. At the same time we have to look for areas where we can reciprocally beneficially cooperate. Cooperation and dialogue are not a reward. They are a necessity. We cannot just shut down our dialogue with Russia.

On this I conclude, and I will now be happy to answer your questions and to go into more details.

**The chairperson:**

Thank you very much. I would now like to give the floor to my colleagues. I will first introduce the ones present at this time. Mr Sjoerdsma from Democrats66, Mr Van Ojik from the GreenLeft. Mr Koopmans from the VVD, which is the liberal party. Mr Krol from the party 50PLUS. Ms Karabulut from the Socialist Party and Mr Van Helvert from the Christian Democrats.

I first give the floor to Mr Koopmans, because he will have to leave this meeting early. Mr Koopmans.

**Mr Koopmans (VVD):**

Thank you chair, and I also thank the colleagues for allowing me to do that. I have two questions for the first two speakers. Some colleagues here suggest that we should think of an alternative to NATO. What do you think Russia would make of that suggestion? And the second question: some colleagues say that we should draft proposals for a European continent without nuclear weapons. Of course understanding that this stops at the Urals, where nuclear weapons can exist. How do you think Russia would take it if the Netherlands came up with such a proposal? Thank you.

**The chairperson:**

Thank you. We can take some questions before answering? But it may also be good for the discussion if you answer this one now and then the MPs can react to the answers. Mr Adomeit.

**Mr Adomeit:**

Well, Russia would be delighted to see any further weakening of NATO. Any alternatives that the Europeans could conceivably come up with, would be second or third best. From the German point of view, there may be some support for an increase of defence expenditures up to the 2% level required by the NATO meeting in Wales, but if you were to try to sell this increase in terms of building up military potential vis-à-vis Russia, this would be impossible. After all, I hear all these calls for a unity in Europe and all that, including the calls which the two of you have not made for some military coherence and a greater military build-up, but the domestic audiences in the countries in question are not inclined towards any such design. So in short: it would be a very bad idea. It would be welcomed by Russia, as it would be perceived as just one more step in the process of weakening Europa and its position vis-à-vis Russia.

**Ms Liik:**

I think Russia would take neither of these ideas very seriously. As for an alternative to NATO: Russia is a much stronger believer in NATO than many NATO countries. The idea that NATO could not be there is just not taken seriously. Any initiative taken in the field of European defence is largely misunderstood in Moscow. They do not understand what to make of it. One Russian analyst told me that when there is talk about a European army, some people in Moscow will think: oh my god, then there will be two armies against us, that of NATO and that of Europe. Whereas others think that the European army will be called NATO army and it will be fine. Neither is true, so that would just utterly confuse them. Likewise, I think that a Europe without nuclear weapons would make Russia think that we are not serious, we are stupidly idealistic and not really serious people with whom you can discuss anything at all.

**The chairperson:**

Mr Secieru, you want to add anything to this? No? Okay, then Mr Van Ojik has a question.

**Mr Van Ojik (GroenLinks):**

Thank you, chair. I am very much inclined to react to the questions and the answers, but I will not do that. Thank you very much, it was very interesting to listen to you. I have a general question to all of you if you care to respond. It is about the perceived strength of Russia, because we tend to see Russia or Putin as a more or less strong and permanent political and economic factor, but in fact, Russia is relatively weak economically and politically, the position of Putin may not be as strong as it used to be for a long time. Maybe it has even weakened quite rapidly in recent times. I was wondering whether, in discussing Russia, we should

not take into account that political and economic developments in fact tend to weaken the political leadership and the economy in the time to come, rather than strengthening them.

**Mr Secrieru:**

When thinking about power in the case of Russia, there are two dimensions. One is capabilities and the other one is the will to use these capabilities. When looking at the EU as well, we are looking at the economic capabilities of the EU and the will, or the lack of will, to use them in foreign policy. Over the last decade, I think that the Russian economy has not grown fantastically as compared to the 2000s. But at the same time, macroeconomic policies were very sound, there are enough reserves to sustain economic shocks and I think there is a sort of instable stability, I would say, internally. In terms of power projection, Russia is not trying to compete with the European Union in economic terms. That is why they are trying to switch the competition to military terms, where Russia feels much more comfortable and powerful. That is why they try to introduce the element of insecurity and to use tactics to bring the European Union to the negotiation table. I agree with you that when we analyse Russia, we need to keep in balance their strengths, but at the same time their weaknesses as well.

If I had to list their weaknesses, I would first of all mention their incapacity to read societal dynamics. They do not read what is happening in terms of societal transformations. They do not believe in the protests in Georgia, or in Ukraine or in Moldova: they were not genuine protests. They tend to think that it is controllable. This is a big weakness of Russian leadership: they misinterpret and do not understand the societal dynamics, which are very powerful.

The second element is the overuse of military force, the overuse of economic coercion. This actually turns Russia's former or actual allies away from Russia. Look at what is happening in the relations between Russia and Belarus. Look at what is happening in terms of Russia-Armenia relations, where allies who are members of a military alliance led by Russia, were looking and making attempts to reach the European Union to advance dialogue and strategic partnerships with us. So I think they miscalculate and do not calculate how their coercive tactics can backfire. This is a big weakness of Russian foreign policy.

**Ms Liik:**

I largely agree with this. I think Russia is aware of its weaknesses, to some extent at least. They understand that they are not, and are not going to be, a power on a par with the US and China. So, they are trying to find a niche, a sort of second role, for the future. Yes, they are thinking about what their strengths are and how to use them skilfully. And a while ago, definitely, the willingness to use force and take risks was seen as a competitive advantage. Not to use force against Europe, but in places such as Syria, where others hesitated to intervene, but Russia did not. I think we also see it as their strength that, unlike the West, they are not ideological. That is what they would say themselves. And that is why they are quite successful in the Middle East. They speak with all the countries there and they have become a power broker, unlike Western powers, who take their own values as a basis and where policy has not born fruit. But likewise, there are weaknesses. I think that Russian knowledge about different regions of the world is very uneven. I think they do know quite well the Middle East. Because a powerful school of Middle Eastern studies and people who are Arabists or what not are everywhere in the political spectrum. Their services are in demand. The Kremlin does not think that it knows better. That is why they get that area right. I think they understand Middle Eastern societies better than Western ones. Where society takes the shape of religious or ethnic minorities in the Middle East, they have

scholars who explain it and they get it. But in Ukraine they do not get it at all. They really think that Maidan was a CIA plot. They do not see that Ukraine has a society as well, that can do things themselves. So no area do they know less than post-Soviet space, especially Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

They know Western countries quite well. They know many facts, but they see it through an ideological prism. They might debate developments in countries like Estonia and the Netherlands, looking for the American hand behind it. It is similar to what we saw in the Soviet time. They debated that it was the US or the UK behind Solidarnosc in Poland, because obviously, the Poles themselves could not come up with something like that. When it comes to China, there is simply a shortage of knowledge. It is improving, because now many people are exposed to China and knowledge about China is building up, but it is still very thin, if you compare it to how well they know the Middle East.

Secondly, I think there are weaknesses in communication and signalling. One smart person in the UK asked me: why do they act like that? They say nothing for years and then suddenly there is a blast, like the Munich speech in 2007, where Putin laments about Western behaviour and says it is all wrong. And that nothing happens again. They do not communicate consistently their view and what to do about it. I mention Ukraine and the DCFTA debacle. I was in Moscow in early July 2014 meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov. One of our group asked about Ukraine signing DCFTA. Lavrov said: you know, who cares? Let them sign. That was Moscow's position at the time. A month later, it was a big issue and Putin travelled to Kiev to prevent Ukraine from signing DCFTA. What does that mean? There was lots of soul searching later in Brussels. We thought that we got Russia wrong and did not understand what Russia thinks. No, Russia just failed to articulate and formulate its position. Their position emerged very haphazardly, when someone had read through the DCFTA, walked into the Kremlin saying: it is a bad thing, we need to prevent it. And then suddenly the policy changed. They do not always think things through in time and they do not always articulate their position properly.

**Mr Adomeit:**

Your question pertaining to Putin as compared to the power of Russia seems to imply that Putin's power may be on the wane. There has been some criticism, of course, particularly of his socio-economic policies. But I am firmly convinced that he will retain power beyond 2024, given the recent suggestions for constitutional changes and also the outline of what he is going to do, namely that he may not be president, but in charge of the State Council. In my view, he will effectively remain in power. This brings me to a very important point. There is a middle phenomenon between capabilities on the one hand and the will to use these capabilities. That is the question of the actual feasibility, the possibility of using the capabilities. There is a tremendous advantage in Russia, because of the very personalised and centralised system. I am convinced that on the major questions it is the ruling of Putin that is decisive. In the example of the DCFTA: this would be something that Putin had not really understood. Once something is set out that is to be implemented, all the subordinated institutions defer to the decision that is made at the centre. When it comes to the use of military power, as I said earlier, the situation reminds me very much of the Breshnevian approach, namely the trust that if you apply more and more military and other pressures, the opponent will bend and conform to your will. This has been a tremendous miscalculation, particularly with regard to Ukraine. So again, this is something that goes back to the Breshnevian approach.

**Mr Krol (50PLUS):**

We are talking about the relations with Russia. We talk about governments, we talk about parliaments and we talk about businesses. But what about the media and the people in the country? Are there changes? Can we see that they develop?

**Mr Secrieru:**

There is a very interesting development. We have a new type of mass media channels, which are circumventing Russian state control. When I am saying this, I have in mind a very popular YouTube channel, conducted by Mr Dud. He has more followers than several Russian state television channels combined. His latest show, a documentary on Beslan (school siege 2004), gathered around 20 million views in Russia and the post-Soviet space over the past four months. He is not the only person. I have seen several Russian rappers who are becoming a bit political as well. They are very popular on YouTube, too. So I see the emergence of media personalities who are very popular and who circumvent the Russian state television and the control by the Russian state. Another interesting change in terms of people: we see that an interesting trend is reurbanisation, the spectacular growth of the cities with more than 1 million inhabitants. This process is driven by the migration of young people from small towns, which are based around one industry or factory, into the big cities, which offer much more opportunities. These young people are developing more and more consumerist logic. They are getting used to select products. I do not think it has been translated into political thinking and political choices, but there is a new generation emerging. I am not necessarily saying that they are more liberal, tolerant and so on, but there is a new generation, which is used to selecting and to having options. I do not know how it will play out in the future, but this is a new interesting development to watch. These people are probably ready to defend their right to have free communication. The protesting against the attempt to block the popular communication app Telegram was unusual for Russia: people protesting to have the right to communicate. This is something interesting. I was personally surprised as well and I think it is a trend to watch in the future.

**Mr Adomeit:**

There was a question about the trend to limit the access to the internet and the new laws.

**Ms Liik:**

I have just written a study on the young generation in Russian foreign policy, which you can find on the website of the European Council on Foreign Relations, if you are interested. I found that there are characteristics of people who have been exposed to excessive propaganda. What happens to such people is that they become distrustful of any propaganda, of anything they cannot verify themselves or via their trusted friends. They are intelligent people at that. So they become very strict and they try not to be manipulated, neither by Putin nor by the West. They are very strict about the West as well and they spot it immediately when we preach something different from what we actually do in our behaviour. We do it at our peril and that is a way to lose our soft power. What works with them is naked facts. Give them naked facts and that will change their minds. I think one of the best propaganda offensives – if you want to call it that, but you may also call it differently – the West has launched vis-à-vis Russia was the British police file about Salisbury, showing the two suspects arriving, moving around and leaving. It was better than any big political statement made by London, because political statements are either ideological or opportunistic or what not. What the police gave us on the contrary, mere facts, was perfect. I saw how that

changed minds in Moscow. Many people who would earlier have said: «no, it cannot be, it was not in our interest, that was some sort of false flag attack or god knows what». After these facts, these people walked up to me and said: «yes, indeed, that was really GRU; and really, in Salisbury, that was us».

Likewise I think your country handled the thing with the organization of chemical weapons really well. The facts given without excessive emotions, without excessive ideological or political statements: that is exactly what works with the Russian public.

**Mr Adomeit:**

I have a short addition. When we are looking at the basis of power, the legitimation of power, in particular the changes that have taken place after 2014, the big change was from the Medvedev rhetoric and also some of the policies of socio-economic modernization and cooperation with the West. That backfired and so Putin in the third term of his presidency, after 2012, shifted from a socio-economic modernization to what could be called national patriotic mobilization. And that was very effective. It was very effective with the Crimea annexation and also initially, but only initially, with the intervention in Eastern Ukraine. But – and this is an important point in addition to what you were saying – this has worn off. While there was a patriotic and militaristic wave present in the first two or three years, people are now getting back much more to their own personal economic and social interest. So in that context – to come back to your question – Putin is in a bit of trouble, because he has to deliver something in order to provide for the legitimacy of the system.

**Ms Karabulut (SP):**

Mr Adomeit, could you elaborate a little bit on where the Russian position vis-à-vis Europe and the West comes from? Is it related to our policies on e.g. the NATO enlargement or is it independent from Western policies? And Ms Liik, you showed us a quite depressing picture, as if there is no possibility for EU countries to engage in bilateral relations. Our foreign minister wants to keep the channels of dialogue open. Could you elaborate a little bit on how it is possible for EU countries to have bilateral relations with autocratic regimes or leaders in countries such as Turkey or Saudi-Arabia, and why that is not possible with Russia?

**Mr Adomeit:**

Maybe I should start with your first question. It links up to what I was just saying about this very significant change that took place in this so-called tandem period. That would be between 2008 and 2012, when Medvedev was president and Putin was in the background as prime-minister, so it was said, when in fact he was of course still steering things. Your question was: what makes the Russian foreign policy tick and what is the impact, so to speak, of NATO enlargement? This of course is the central Russian narrative. As soon as we complain about anything that Russia is doing, we immediately get the reply: well, you are to blame, because you spoke in a triumphant tone after the collapse of the Soviet Union and you continued the policy of putting more and more military and political pressure to areas ever closer to Russian borders and so forth. That is the central Russian narrative and I think that this is completely wrong. Look back a bit further to the early nineties. At first when Yeltsin appeared in the United Nations, he called the United States and the West, in a speech at the UN, not just partners, but allies, «sojusniki». But already in November 1993, Primakov – one of the specialists in international relations who chaired, at that time, the foreign intelligence service – commissioned a study on NATO. In 1993! And suddenly, NATO appeared, without any particular cause, as a major threat again and we were back to the Cold War stereotypes. So where was that threat in 1993? Everybody

was with a peace dividend. What is the explanation for this? It is domestic politics. It is because you had this huge military industrial complex of millions and millions of people there, who were completely against this reconciliation with the West, and you had more than a million people in the armed forces.

These conservative forces got together and they reconstructed the NATO threat. In 1993. To link up to what I was saying earlier: the reason why Putin changed the policies of Medvedev in 2012 has everything to do with the concern of his domestic power. He felt that cooperation with the West was undermining the very basis of his power in Russia. So it is domestic politics.

**Ms Karabulut (SP):**

So in your opinion – to get it right – it is unrelated to any Western policies or behaviour?

**Mr Adomeit:**

Not completely unrelated, but it is subordinated to it. The central part is: how do we maintain power? In my view that is the primary consideration.

**Ms Liik:**

To address your question about Western behaviour. Of course different episodes play a role. I could see how the bombing overshadowed the reputation of NATO in Russia in 1999. The image of NATO changed to become totally different. But Western actions are also not always understood properly in Russia. I think very few people are aware of the gravity of what was happening in Kosovo and why that was. They would think: it is NATO going against the Slavic nation, because we are Slavs and that is plainly not true. So perceptions mix. Some are reality and some are totally outlandish ideas.

I think where it all went wrong was probably in the early 1990s, when Russia itself signalled us that it was willing to become part of the Western system and adapt our values. They were sincere at the time and they signed up to the demands they later could not follow, for various reasons, most of them being domestic, but maybe not only. That created the traumatic situation that Russia felt it was criticized and misunderstood. I think that if Russia had managed to articulate early on «okay, Europeans, you see the world like that, win-win and so forth, but we see it differently and our interests are these and these and these», then the whole relationship would have been tailored differently.

I often talk with Russians about that because to me, it is curious. There are very clearly some misunderstandings involved and people who have been following Russian foreign policy tell me that the people who took over the formulating of foreign policy in the early nineties, were sort of Gorbachevian technocratic universalists and they just refused to formulate Russia's national interest. National interest was seen as something backward and outdated; you do not formulate it. So they only articulated it later in a different situation, having signed up to Western wishes beforehand and that put us in a tragic spiral in which we had plans that were never fulfilled. I do not think it is anyone's fault really. I think everyone had the best intentions, it just did not work out.

On the bilateral relations: you can have relations, but the question is what you can achieve. My thesis is that no European country can ever talk about sort of normative issues of world order with Russia, because Russia does not talk with single European capitals. London is about to discover it. They want to have that conversation and I do not see Moscow wanting to have it with London. Moscow will have that conversation with a combination of Paris, Berlin and Brussels, if we are lucky. If we are not lucky, then the conversation will take place with none of us, but with Beijing and Washington instead. That is it. Of course politicians and ministers can go

to Moscow and meet Putin and their counterparts and deliver messages and understand Moscow's position. But that has a sheer political normative value to the extent that it serves EU foreign policy. I think that countries like Germany or Finland understand it very well. They maintain actually quite intensive bilateral relationships. No-one talks to Putin more often than Merkel and the minister goes to Moscow all the time as well, but we both see that they are helping European foreign policy and not some sort of solo, expected to achieve big aims.

**The chairperson:**

Thank you, Ms Liik. I am sorry Mr Secrieru, but I would like to give the floor to two more colleagues. Mr Van Helvert does not have a question. We have a few minutes left, so Mr Sjoerdsma, the floor is yours.

**Mr Sjoerdsma (D66):**

Thank you very much for your very interesting introductions. I have a question for Ms Liik, because I was intrigued by the monastery analogy that you put on the table. For a monastery to function effectively, the inhabitants need to be unified around a certain ideology or faith, but they also need to be open towards those who may be interested in the ideology or the values that the monastery exhibits. Perhaps it is a question for all of you. I would like to hear how you think we could get the Russian population – not the leaders, not the leadership, but the population – into that monastery, given our current visa restrictions. How should we interact with the Russian population in an effort to get our monastery to work?

**Ms Liik:**

I am not sure how big an obstacle visas actually are. I do not think visa freedom for Russia is a good idea under the current circumstances. Many nice people in Moscow would tell you exactly that, but it would be seen as a reward by the Putinist system, plus we have many Russian officials on visa blacklists. I do not think it is feasible to have visa freedom now. But you could introduce long-term free Schengen visas for certain categories of people, be it students, be it NGOs, whatever. I think that would be doable. It would also help to address selected groups. I would find it useful to show them European policy-making as it is. We have been telling Russians a lot about how good we are, how strong we are, what our values are. I think now we should also show our weaknesses. We should show them that if we do something stupid, it is not a conspiracy but chaos. Because that part they do not get. They think that everything is well thought through and well executed, so I would really want some Russian NGO people or scholars or young activists invited to have a good conversation with say Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. He is a decent honest person. Let him tell them how NATO decision-making works. What have the debates been like? What has been said? There may of course be some secrets involved, but a lot can actually be told. Having that kind of true inside picture is something that may help change minds as well. Do not go with didactic propaganda. They just shut up immediately. They have been overexposed to that and they have an allergic reaction. But if a Western speaker turns up and starts with some sort of self-deprecating show and admits Western mistakes because these exist, that may put you in a position to tell the Russians some very inconvenient truths and they will accept them. There are platforms on which you can do that.

**The chairperson:**

Thank you. Does anyone want to add any more questions? No. Thank you so much. It is exactly a quarter past three and we have planned this session until right now. Thank you all very much for your introduction, for answering our questions and for putting very interesting things on the

table. I think that the colleagues will be able to use this in their debate on the Russia strategy.

After a short break I would like to invite our guest Mr Inozemtsev for the second session on domestic developments and the human rights situation in Russia. Please have a seat, Sir.

## **Session 2: Domestic developments and human rights situation**

- Mr Vladislav Inozemtsev, Center for Strategic & International Studies, Director and founder of the Center for Post-Industrial Studies

### **The chairperson:**

Our second session is about to start. Some of the colleagues are taking a short break. They will be back really soon. I would like to welcome Mr Vladislav Inozemtsev. I was told you are travelling through Europe. You have been to Poland and to Paris and by the end of this week you will return to Washington. We are very happy to have you here. You are from the Center for Strategic & International Studies and you are the director and founder of the Center for Post-Industrial Studies. I would like to invite you to give a short introduction, followed by some time for questions and an exchange of ideas.

### **Mr Inozemtsev:**

Thank you very much for inviting me here. It is a big pleasure and honour to address the members of the Dutch parliament and to brief them about the situation in Russia. As an economist I will focus first of all on the economic issues and then address a few other aspects of the domestic situation. I will not repeat my thesis, because I published it and you can read it. If you have questions, I will be very happy to answer them. In general I would say that Russia is a very specific country, which is economically quite ineffective and politically quite stable, even at this time. In terms of the economy, everyone knows that Russia is a country based on its national wealth, raw materials and resources. Its economy cannot be understood unless you see it as a very redistributive economy. Russia is very unique, because only 1.6 million people, which is around 2.5% of the workforce, is engaged in commodity industries, in extracting oil, gas and matters. Actually, this tiny sector in terms of employment, generates around 71% of Russia's exports and contributes around 45% of the entire income on the federal budget. Therefore, the government is not so much interested in developing the private businesses in the country. It is not so much interested in promoting technological development. Instead, it is interested in promoting and ensuring budget stability, surpluses, which can be used in times of trouble for pacifying the people and for increasing their income. Therefore, I would say very honestly that my feeling is that Mr Putin in the past ten or even more years has not been interested in economics at all, because he understands that if the oil prices are high enough, if the budget policies are responsible enough not to produce additional or excessive spending, you will definitively have some resources and means to give the people the money they deserve for times in which the economy is doing worse. So therefore, I would say that in general, the Russian leadership sees the economy not as a kind of independent or even basic sphere of public life, but just as a means of producing budget income, which the government can use as it wants. I would also like to say that the Russian economy stagnated for around ten years. The gross rates are very small, around 1%, maybe 1.2% per year. Actually if you check out when this has started, I would say it was not a result of the occupation of Crimea or the war in Ukraine, which started in 2014. It actually was a result of Mr Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 and it seems that since then, we saw constantly diminishing growth rates, which went negative in 2014/2015. Why? I think that is quite

obvious, because what Mr Putin now offers to the Russian people, to the Russian population, is a kind of arbitrary rulings, of arbitrary management when you have no rules at all. When we had lunch earlier, I said to a few of your colleagues: since the Russian Federation became independent in 1991, not one election to the Russian parliament was conducted according to the same rules as the previous one. So now you see all these changes in the constitution, which are made just in order to suit Mr Putin's will. The most recent case, which emerged yesterday, the selling of Sberbank, from the central bank of Russia to the government, to the state agency for state property, was actually a case for which no laws exist at all. For every specific reason you can adopt another special law in just a few days» time.

I would say that under such conditions, you cannot expect the economy to grow. Nevertheless, the Kremlin is now masterfully using both economic and political issues, both on the domestic and the foreign policy agenda, to seduce the Russian population to stay calm. Now even the very harsh and unfriendly relationship between Russia and the Western world is used to produce the feeling, in the Russian people, that even the absence of economic laws can be tolerated since there is no war, no physical confrontation with the West. The idea of the Kremlin is that we are in such a tense situation in the global arena that you can wait for a couple of years or maybe many years for economic growth to resume, because now we have much more acute and much more crucial issues to resolve.

What I would like to say in some finalizing remarks: first of all, do not expect any kind of rational economic revival anytime soon, because for many years now, Mr Putin has been talking about some kind of breakthrough, which is actually one of the elements of the Russian official rhetoric. I would not trust him on this, because actually there are no resources available for producing an economic breakthrough. There is no human potential or human capital in Russia for producing such a breakthrough. We can talk about this in more detail if you want to. If you look for example at the Russian high tech industries or the Russian military industrial complex, you may see that it is very difficult for the Russian industry to produce anything in huge quantities of a quality that can actually be considered as competitive in the global arena.

Russia is heavily dependent on imports in any crucial technological sector. The most important thing you should take into consideration is that the Russian economic and political sphere is actually a sphere of imitation. Imitation is everywhere, in amounts that are growing. To give you a very simple example, look at the statistics of Russian scientific articles produced in the country and of the number of patent applications filed for example in 2018. If compared to China, Russia claims to have only six times less scientific articles which were published in the peer-reviewed press. At the same time, they filed 75 times less patent applications than the Chinese. So even the so-called academic and scientific activity is mostly imitational. We can talk about this in more detail if you wish. In many, many technological and industrial areas, Russia is working on its image much more than producing actual products.

What about the politics of the European Union or the West in general vis-à-vis Russia? I would say that the most general approach is «wait and see», because – I agree on this with the colleagues who spoke before – there are very few measures the European Union or Western countries can take in order to change the Russian attitude or to change the Russian foreign or domestic policies. I am not a specialist in human rights issues, but I would say that in Russia, the Kremlin believes that there is not even a matter that can be called human rights, because in the Russian security doctrine it is mentioned that Russian traditional values are the basis of the Russian society and the promotion of the traditional ways of Russia is one of the most important elements of promoting and safeguarding national security. Therefore, I would say that the dialogue about human rights and

human liberties in the Western sense of the word is very ... It may not be irrelevant, but it is very hard to be promoted in the relationship between the West and Russia.

So getting back to the approach in general, I would say that since the West cannot actually change the Russian behaviour, the most relevant approach would be not to engage too much in negotiations with Russia. Just keep aside and promote some kind of strategic deterrence. At the same time, I would like to very honestly say the following. What the Western policy vis-à-vis Russia lacks, is some kind of a positive agenda. The Kosovo issue in 1999 was mentioned, which presumably alienated Russia and Europe or the West. I would say that there are even deeper sources of dissatisfaction. Because in the late eighties, when the Soviet Union collapsed and when Russia appeared as a new country, they opened up to the West, but from the part of the West there was no such thing as an agenda on how to engage Russia and on what Europeans wanted to get from Russia, how they were trying to see Russia in the future.

A few years ago, I compared this even in the Dutch press to the situation in Germany in 1918, when the Weimar Republic was conceived as a normal country. Everyone knows what happened later. Russia in 1992 was also considered a normal country, which can develop. Due to developments in its market economy and democratic society, it was considered as something closer to European nations. This approach failed. So after 1945, European nations and the United States were clever enough to engage Germany in a very strong way, through NATO, through the European Union after the Second World War. Later, Germany appeared to be an engine for growth in Europe and the most law-abiding country in the entire old world.

So my point is that it has nothing to do with Putin's Russia today, because you cannot do anything. You should focus on creating a new concept of dealing with Russia after Putin. Putin is not there forever. If Europe will not have any kind of relevant strategy to deal with Russia – with Russia, not with Putin – you may see the situation of 1992 repeated and that would not be good for anyone.

On a much more practical level, I would want to make two small points. First of all, I would say that Russia currently exports not only oil and gas. It exports corruption, dirty money and all these inconsistent practices. It exports all this to Europa as well. Maybe not first of all, but it does export all this to the Netherlands, to the United Kingdom and to other European countries which get a lot of Russian money invested. In some cases, these countries develop their judicial practises to accommodate this money and this is a huge problem and a huge danger, for Europe and for the West. And the last point is this. It was said that you should encourage Russian people to engage in human connections, personal connections with Europe and so on. Yes, that may be true, but in any case you can see that in the last ten to fifteen years, around 2.5 millions of Russians got either a European passport or a European residence permit. Not all of them are decent people who are fascinated by Western values. Among them are many Russian officials, their children or relatives, and they are people who bring here the conservative values that Mr Putin likes. So I would say that this is also a point for more cautiousness. The Western countries have to review how many of the people whom you try, or whose system you try to confront, are already here, inside Europe.

The **chairperson**:

Thank you very much. I would like to start with Ms Karabulut.

Ms **Karabulut** (SP):

Thank you, Mr Inozemtsev. It is very interesting that you mentioned, at the end of your presentation, that Russia is exporting corruption and dirty

money to European countries, as we have close economic relations with Russia. Could you elaborate a bit more on this? How should we tackle this big problem, in your opinion?

**Mr Inozemtsev:**

I would say the problem is really big, because the Russian economy is the only one in the world in which 60% to 70% of all the productive assets existing in it are owned by offshore companies. So all the schemes are very popular in Russia and they are used not only by Russian commercial companies that try to minimize their taxes. They are also used by the state-owned corporations. A lot of subsidiaries of Gazprom are actually registered in the Netherlands, I would say. Why is that so important? Because everybody will say that Russia is a country in which the rule of law does not exist. Why is that so? Because the Russian companies are externalized, even those belonging to the bureaucrats and to the political people.

In Russia, I would say, public service is the most profitable element and kind of business. So the people who control these companies can settle all their quarrels and disputes in the Netherlands or in the high court of London. Because of that, they do not need any kind of rule of law inside their own country. If you throw them out of here, the demand for a rule of law in Russia will increase. You cannot actually promote the rule of law in Russia if you offer it to them here. That is a big, big problem. Moreover – maybe this is not a very polite thing to say – if you encourage the immigration of people from Russia into the European Union, you will never achieve a successful democracy in Russia, because there is a very big problem.

For example, remember why the Soviet Union collapsed and why democracy prevailed in the late eighties. First of all, because there was no option to change your fate without changing the fate of your country. Nowadays, there is a dilemma between collective change inside Russia or individual change. You buy a ticket, you fly to Paris and everything is fine with you. You can sell your apartment in Moscow and you can buy two houses in Germany. It is not a problem. Therefore, this huge outflow of people, the most decent and the most pro-democratic and pro-European people from Russia to countries abroad is a big problem for Russia. Because what Mr Putin is doing, is creating a special programme of inviting people from the Eurasian Economic Union that is from the old Soviet Republics, into Russia and naturalizing them. This is actually diminishing social capital. The self-made people leave the country and leave Russia to immigrate in Europe, thus decreasing the pressure on Putin's regime. While people from Kirgistan, from Turkmenistan, from Uzbekistan are coming into Russia, being absolutely on a par with this autocratic system.

**Mr Krol (50PLUS):**

I missed the beginning of your introduction, so I do not know whether you already talked about it, but then again: when we talk about human rights in Russia, then we always talk about gay rights. Can you say something about what you see in your direct environment and what you see in general?

**Mr Inozemtsev:**

It is an interesting question. Once again: I am not a specialist on human rights, but I would say that on the surface, there are much less problems than are openly talked about. Because everyone is very much aware of two laws that were adopted in Russia several years ago. The first one was a law about the propaganda of untraditional sexual relations among the youth. The second one was a law on adoption. If you focus on the first one, I would say that it was never ever used or implemented for

sentencing anyone to any kind of prison term. So in Russia you have a lot of laws that are adopted not for being used, but just to threaten someone. They play a potential role, as a threat, to prevent people from openly doing this or that. This was one of these issues.

I would say that gay people are quite widely present in the Russian leadership. They are very often to be met even in the Russian Orthodox Church. My point is that in general, I would not say that there is open discrimination of these people. There are, of course, some efforts to limit their public activities, like for example gay parades and such, but in general I would not say that there are special efforts of the state to limit the activity of gay people or to make their life much harder in Russia. However, there is another problem. The propaganda and the intolerance produced by the state makes many ordinary people very aggressive towards gays and that is another problem. There are several cases of humiliation, there are several cases of even killings, just based on personal hatred. Of course, this is a result of the government policy, but it is definitely not the intention of this policy.

**Mr Van Ojik** (GroenLinks):

Thank you very much. Maybe I can follow up on the question asked by Ms Karabulut. As you said, we here in the Netherlands might be a small player, but we are linked economically to the Russian economy in many ways. Take for example energy or the import of corruption, because if they export corruption and dirty money, then we are the importers of these vices. I was wondering how we can escape from that deadlock. After all, it is not so easy to say: we simply cut the ties with Russia. We are linked in many ways and maybe it is not even wise to cut the economic ties with Russia. But as long as we are economically linked with Russia ... We have the Zuidas, where all these Russian oligarchs put their money, without us being able to control it and without our government communicating about it with parliament and so forth. What is the way out of that dilemma, in your view?

**Mr Inozemtsev:**

There is no comprehensive programme for this. I would suggest making very small steps. For example there were two attempts by the Russian government – the first one in 2013 and the second one just now, when they discussed amending the constitution – to prevent people with a foreign passport or residence permit or who own property in foreign countries, to access public service and government positions. From my point of view it would be a good move on the side of the European Union to make public this passport database. Not to send it to the Russian authorities, just to make it public. That would help the Russian anticorruption activists very much and it would make the Russian government face reality. Because in many cases, for example in the case of Spain and in case of the Baltic countries as well, the governments made a lot of effort to cover up the fact that the Russian officials possess their passport, residence permit or real estate property. It is just about more openness.

**Mr Sjoerdsma** (D66):

Thank you very much. I was just rereading your letter. Throughout your talk there is a sense that, as you put it, engagement will not really help if we look at the Russian leadership. Yet you also strongly plead for a positive agenda. You said that a positive agenda is missing. Perhaps it would be good for us to know how you reconcile these two things and what the positive agenda should be at this point in time.

**Mr Inozemtsev:**

That is a good question. Maybe it is not realistic, but I would say that Russia today is not prepared to take advice from Europe or to be careful

about this kind of positive agenda. However, everyone knows that Russia is now in a huge conflict with Ukraine and Ukraine actually tries to adopt some European values and to follow the European path. They even have hopes to join the European Union, which I think is absolutely unrealistic. But I would say that you should somehow try to find new forms of engagement. For example as the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, it might well be that within some time from now, the «Europe of different speeds» will emerge. So the core European Union, which is continental Europe, and countries like the United Kingdom on the one side, and on the other Island, Norway and Switzerland, which are not a formal part of the European Union, but adopt many of the EU laws, respect the decisions of the European Court of Justice and are inside the European free-travel zone, in which people can work and engage with each other freely. For this, these countries – Island, Norway, Switzerland – even contribute to the European budget.

Why not offer the same possibility to Ukraine? Allow them not to become a member state of the European Union, but to become a part of the broader zone. That would include economic cooperation, law enforcement, some kind of guarantees to the investors and so on. If Ukraine, for example, were to do much better after this, the Russian society, the Russian people, would reflect on this as well. I would say that you can never feel safe and secure as long as Russia is out of your reach. You can only feel safe and secure once, many years from now, Russia will be inside this bigger European structure, if it respects the European laws and regulations, if it understands that it is not only good, but also profitable and useful for it to be inside this kind of union or another kind of association. Only in that case will you be secure. Maybe Russia will not be an actual genuine part of Europe, but it will be a part on which you can rely.

This is a strategic goal for the European Union. For some areas I would say: look, in the world of the 21st century, with all its challenges, Europe cannot remain a huge global power, a global player, without consolidating the whole Eurocentric world. One part of this world was Russia as a colonial power which stretched to the Pacific Ocean. And another part of it were the United States and Canada, another colonial power stretching to the Pacific Ocean. This is a kind of Northern ring, a Northern belt that was produced by Europe and it should be somehow kept together by the European values.

The **chairperson**:

Thank you. We have some more questions. Ms Karabulut.

Ms **Karabulut** (SP):

What about the corruption and the oligarchs in Ukraine, Belarus et cetera, et cetera? Is that not the same problem as we have with the export of corruption from Russian companies to EU countries? Is it not one and the same system they are working in? It is not the ideal democratic system without corruption, or am I wrong?

Mr **Inozemtsev**:

Once again: it is not only about corruption. When you talk about corruption, anyone understands that it is about laws and rules that establish the country and if you bypass these rules, you can corrupt some officials. You give them some money and the deal can be made. In Russia it is not so much corruption in the centre of the system. It is just a misuse of state power in your personal interest. The system creates laws and regulations, which allow the government officials to profit from their current position. There are not so many oligarchs in Russian that are independent from the state. Many of them, for example the owners of the Alfa Group or Mr Prokhorov, already transferred around 90% of their

assets to the West. So now the people who are in charge of the Russian politics and the major Russian industries are very well connected to the power elite.

My point therefore is that you should maybe not try to keep them out of here, but to first of all make all of their moves public. The second point is: there are so many people who are evidently corrupt, who after being expelled from Russia or fleeing from Russia put their capitals here, and they are absolutely immune. That is a problem, because in this case, the Russian bureaucrats, the Russian oligarchs and everyone who is engaged in some extralegal activity inside Russia understands that they can become immune if they move to Europe. This is a big, big problem actually.

**Ms Karabulut (SP):**

I do agree on that. So then the next question is: why do European countries accept this? To a certain level it is a system that also works in Ukraine and Belarus.

**Mr Inozemtsev:**

Not only. The global corruption flows ...

**Ms Karabulut (SP):**

It is a kind of capitalism, right?

**Mr Inozemtsev:**

Yeah, definitely. It is huge! As far as I know, an expert from the United States says that the flow of illegal money from all the underdeveloped nations into the major financial centres is around 1 trillion dollars a year. So this is not a question about Russia only. It is about judicial systems, about offshore finance, about huge Western banks profiting from it, about huge legal companies that are doing business on this. And the legislation in Luxemburg, in the United Kingdom, in Switzerland is developing in a way that suits them to keep doing this. And that is a problem. Actually it is not about Russia. It is part of a global problem. Many people now in Davos and everywhere address inequality. That is very acute, but the problem is not ... We are now in the midst of a presidential campaign in the United States and many experts say: we should now increase the taxes to tackle the inequality. But you cannot succeed, because you will see in the Panama Papers that around 1 trillion – not billion, but trillion – dollars was sent around the world just by the clients of three companies. So when you can go off shore, you can evade taxes, even in the Netherlands, in France, in the United Kingdom. This is a global problem. Without finishing this, without putting an end to this, we cannot be successful in combatting inequality in your country. Russia is only a minor issue, it is only an example.

**Mr Van Ojik (GroenLinks):**

Maybe we can return to the domestic economy of Russia. The picture you painted, if I understood you correctly, is quite bleak. Russia is weak on innovation, capital is leaving the country, the country depends on very few products in its export, oil and gas mainly. In the first round of discussions we talked about the growing aspirations of the young population. They increasingly live in the city, they use social media, they listen to rappers et cetera, et cetera. When are these two going to clash? There are growing aspirations on the one hand and a stagnant economic picture on the other.

**Mr Inozemtsev:**

That is a very good question. I cannot answer it, actually, because no one knows when it will happen.

Mr **Van Ojik** (GroenLinks):

Maybe we should start with: will it happen?

Mr **Inozemtsev**:

It will. At some point it will. But you should understand that there are two different issues. First of all, this consumerist attitude of the young people is connected to their everyday behaviour as consumers. They do not translate it into political issues. They will not take to the streets to oppose Mr Putin. Even if 20 million people watch Instagram or YouTube, this is a kind of passive consumption of information. Yes, they are accustomed to the idea that Russian state propaganda is lying. I think 90% of the people will agree to this. But the question is whether this belief will transform into an active position in society and into some kind of protest. I do not think that this will happen soon, simply because the people value maybe not the stability in Putin's sense, but they value their personal safety, their personal well-being and they see that protest is counterproductive. Putin is doing whatever he can to show that any kind of protest is counterproductive. And they see that. Just two days ago, we witnessed a very harsh sentence being passed of 13 to 18 years in prison for a group of young people. I could not even understand what they were accused of. They were presented as a political grouping accused of conducting terrorist activities, but in fact they did none of that. We hear of this type of court rulings every week, so it is very hard to predict whether people will riot at some point. That is a big problem.

The **chairperson**:

Thank you. Mr Sjoerdsma.

Mr **Sjoerdsma** (D66):

In your position paper you made it clear that Mr Putin will stay in power at least until 2024. It is always a bit dangerous to make such predictions. Nobody predicted 1989, for instance. Everybody thought: it is a strong country and we will have to deal with it for many years to come. Which challenge, which problem in Russia do you think Mr Putin is most afraid of and is challenging his authority most at the moment?

Mr **Inozemtsev**:

First about 1989. I would say that there is a huge difference between the Soviet Union of 1989 and Putin's Russia today. I know many people who were political members of the Soviet communist party. I can see how they are living, maybe not today, but ten years ago. In the Soviet Union, believe it or not, the property and the power were separated. In 1989 and 1991, it was all about power. The communist elite left their power positions without a huge amount of property control. Today, property and power are absolutely merged. So now, the leadership in power is the economic leadership as well. They are opposed to any change. They actually fight to make any change impossible, much harder than was the case in the Soviet Union. They will never step down in the way Mr Gorbachev and his aids stepped down. Sorry, the second part of the question was?

Mr **Sjoerdsma** (D66):

Of the challenges you wrote down in your paper, what challenge do you think Mr Putin fears most?

Mr **Inozemtsev**:

I think he fears most of all to be deprived of his powers. I do not know how he can imagine this could happen. I do not say that he will stay in power as president until 2024 or even longer, but nevertheless, he will definitely somehow govern the country, throughout his life. This is his

strongest aspiration, because he cannot understand how the system can be reproduced without him. The moment of truth came in 2011/2012. At that time, there was a lot of hope that Mr Medvedev would become president. Mr Putin might try to implement some kind of Mexican or Chinese model, replacing the leader, but keeping the system intact. Mr Medvedev was not revolutionary. If he had been allowed to run for a second term of office, the system might have become a bit more liberal, but in principle it would have remained the same. Then a third president would have come and the system still would remain the same, because the beneficiaries of the system will be the same and so will the way of conducting the economic development. But the leader will be different and the aspirations of the people will actually be a little bit different. But Mr Putin decided to remove Mr Medvedev and to return to power himself. That was a choice that made the system very inflexible. Now, the fate of Mr Putin and the fate of the system are absolutely merged. If he is gone, the system will be gone. It cannot be reproduced without him. All the moves initiated on 15 January are about this. They do not understand how they can preserve the system without Mr Putin. That is the biggest problem.

**The chairperson:**

Thank you very much, Mr Inozemtsev.

We have reached the end of this meeting. As I mentioned before, this committee will use the information provided today in the preparation of the debate about Russia scheduled for 20 April.

For now, I would like to thank our guests – you, Mr Inozemtsev, but also our guests from the first session – for joining us today. I also would like to thank the members of the committee for their questions. This round table was very helpful for the preparation of the debate.

Sluiting 16.01 uur.