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EU Divided Over Russia. Again.

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EuroPoint: As the EU summit in Brussels on March 19 is getting closer, divisions between member states over an approach to Russia are growing wider. In lack of a consensus for a tough stance against Putin, EU leaders will most likely adopt the “lowest common denominator” for the conclusions of the summit. Business as usual.

The [draft agenda](#) of the summit is dedicated entirely to EU’s relations with Russia: Energy Union (what happens in the eventuality of a Russian gas cut-off), the situation in Ukraine, and finding a “steer in view” of the Eastern Partnership.

A few events in the past days increased the tensions between Russia and the West: the United States announced the sale of \$75 million worth of non-lethal military equipment to Ukraine (drones, counter-mortar radar, etc.); a few days earlier, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker called for the creation of an EU army to face up to Russia and boost the credibility of EU’s diplomacy.



Putin, Poroshenko, and EU leaders © EU 2014

EU member states fall within three main approaches towards Russia.

Calling Out Appeasement

The military upmanship camp led by the UK, the Baltics, and the Eastern European countries with borders close to Russia, stand ready to send arms to Ukraine if the Minsk II ceasefire does not hold.

British PM David Cameron warned in September 2014 of “[appeasing](#)” Putin as Western Europe did with Hitler in 1938, in the years leading to WWII. “This time we cannot meet Putin’s demands. He has already taken Crimea, and we cannot allow him to take the whole country ... we run the risk of repeating the mistakes made in Munich in ’38” said Cameron at a Brussels summit in September.

In February, Cameron announced the [deployment of military advisers](#) to Ukraine. Lithuania reintroduced the [military draft](#). And non-NATO members Sweden and Finland announced a plan to go to war together if attacked.

Realpolitik

Fearing an escalation of the conflict, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is conducting a policy of appeasement towards Russia. At the Munich Security Conference in February, Merkel called for a “healthy dose of realism, ongoing

commitment, and strategic patience.” She drew parallels with the realpolitik of 1961, when the United States allowed the Soviet Union to build the Berlin wall, avoiding another war. Germany eventually reunified peacefully. “A new division in Europe is in none of our interests, and a confrontation which risks spiraling out of control certainly isn’t either,” said the chancellor in front of an audience that included Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko.

Rapprochement

On the opposite side, Italy, Spain, Greece, Hungary, and Cyprus are courting reconciliation with Russia, mostly, for economic reasons. At a March visit in Moscow, the Spanish Foreign Minister said there were no reasons for expanding sanctions since the Minsk agreements are being observed and the heavy weapons are being withdrawn. He then explained, “sanctions are inflicting great damage to the Spanish economy, we have big losses, especially in the agricultural sector.”

Cypriot president Nicos Anastasiades [signed](#) a deal with the Russian President that would allow Russian navy ships to use Cypriot ports for supplies and maintenance. This would expand Moscow’s military presence and global reach. The UK was quick to react, since Britain has a permanent base on the island already.

Creating Legends

On March 8, Russian TV aired a trailer for a documentary called “Homeward Bound” in which Putin describes developing the secret plan to seize Crimea, and giving orders to his commandos to do so. At the time, Putin [denied](#) any Russian military involvement in Crimea.

The [Debaltseve massacre](#) and the sustained shelling near Donetsk and Mariupol after the Minsk II ceasefire treaty entered into force prove that Putin has no good will to respect Russia’s agreements. EU Council President Donald Tusk told the [New York Times](#) that the Minsk II protocol was violated more than 1,000 times. Yet he is realistic about the low chances of finding consensus between 28 democracies, “not only states, but democracies.”

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