



**The loss of trust between Russia and the West has been profound.**

It is now very hard to overcome because it is increasingly institutionalised.

**It feeds a confrontation that is likely to persist for many years.**

This confrontation is already dangerous and costly.

**There are no easy solutions to the confrontation. But there are still choices to be made about whether it becomes even more costly and dangerous or less so.**

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We are members of a group of mid-career professionals from across the European continent.

Our backgrounds are diverse; our viewpoints even more so. We have differing levels of understanding and expertise about Russia-West differences.

We disagree among ourselves about who and what is responsible for this divide and about what should be done about it.

But we agree on two points that are important for Europe's future security and well-being: stop stereotyping; start talking.

### **Stop stereotyping**

There are many ways in which each side in this confrontation paints the other black and itself white.

There are differing world views among individuals and societies, with differences fueled by feelings about what is right or legal or fair and by a strong sense of external threat.

Our politics and media can choose to amplify these feelings because this plays well with key audiences.

Our security establishments are bound to take a pessimistic view of the potential threat from the other side.

It is easier and more appealing at many levels to stereotype the other than to assess the many factors at play. But simplification of statements about the other feeds further simplification. It leads to simplification of policy, failure to recognise that the other side is not monolithic in its own views, and missed opportunities to reduce risks.

Once started, such dynamics are hard to overcome. They become embedded in public discourse, domestic politics and national security machinery.

We suggest, simply, that greater effort should be made to promote awareness of stereotypes and how they are at work.

We suggest that the extent to which public figures – whether journalists, officials or politicians – do this is a real measure of their interest in the responsible management of the confrontation between the West and Russia.

## **Start Talking**

Talking to each other may not have resolved our differences. But we have found that it has improved our understanding of them.

More, it has helped us understand the range of views in Russia and in Western countries about our predicament.

It has also helped us to identify and be more aware of the stereotypes we all hold about our own countries and about the other side.

In these ways, dialogue has helped us to improve our communication to others in our group holding very different views. It has also helped us better to identify and discuss practical ways forward.

We suggest, simply, that more dialogue between Russia and the West would have similar effects.

‘Dialogue’ need not be narrowly defined for these purposes. It does not have to be – indeed should not be – purely at summit level. Dialogue can be at least modestly useful between civil society and non-governmental groups such as ours. It can take the form of practical collaborations between areas of our societies and economies as yet unparalysed by confrontation. It should include contacts between lower levels of our government machines.

Engaging in dialogue helps overcome stereotyping. Overcoming stereotyping improves policy. Good policy can reduce the costs and dangers of the confrontation in which Russia and Western countries find themselves.

*The opinions articulated above also do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Leadership Network or any of its members. The ELN's aim is to encourage debates that will help develop Europe's capacity to address pressing foreign, defence, and security challenge.*

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