

BRIEFING

Russia's G8 presidency: With an ambitious agenda, can Moscow deliver?

Abstract

In January 2014, the Russian Federation took over the G8 presidency from the United Kingdom, and with it the responsibility for shaping the year's political agenda and for organising this year's G8 summit, to be held on 4-5 June 2014 in Sochi. A latecomer to the G8 (having become a member in 1997), Russia has assertively pursued its foreign policy interests within the group. The current Russian presidency has decided on a range of priorities, largely corresponding to Moscow's own current policy interests and to the priorities of Russia's previous, 2006 G8 presidency. This year's foci include the fight against drug trafficking and terrorism, conflict resolution, disaster management and health security. While Russia has said it supports enhancing the parliamentary dimension of the G8, this year's annual speakers' meeting has again been scheduled after the summit itself – on 5-7 September 2014 (in Moscow) – which means the speakers' meeting will take place too late to feed recommendations and insights into the summit itself. While the G8 has been accused of elitism and of failing to fully implement its summits' commitments, the group remains an important platform for its members to discuss – and often find common positions on – key foreign policy issues.

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1. The Russian presidency of the G8

In 2014, the Russian Federation assumed the annual presidency of the Group of Eight world economic powers — the G8. The role will allow Russia to set the political agenda for discussions to be held throughout the year. A latecomer to the group (having joined the G8 in 1997), the Russian Federation has in the past used the G8 as a platform to pursue its national interests, often presenting a dissenting voice during discussions of key foreign policy issues. Some observers have also accused Russia of eroding the G8's coherence. In the run-up to the EU-Russia summit, which took place in on 28 January 2014, the Russian G8 'sherpa' (the personal representative of the government in charge of preparing the G8 summit), Alexei Kvasov, confirmed the role of the G8 and the Russia's Presidency in this club this year.

The core objectives of the Russia's G8 presidency will include:

- (1) cooperation in the fight against drugs,
- (2) the fight against terrorism,
- (3) the resolution of conflicts,
- (4) the global management of natural and man-made disaster risks and
- (5) global health security (including emerging infections and food safety)¹.

The Russian Federation has presented a strong, often dissenting, voice within the G8.

This list of five priorities differs from those of the United Kingdom's 2013 G8 presidency, which advanced a three-tiered agenda focussed on 'three T's': trade, tax compliance and transparency. Russia's list largely corresponds to current issues in Russia's own policy agenda (shaped in part by the December 2013 terrorist attack in Volgograd and by continued uncertainties about terrorist threats during the Sochi Olympic Games). Russia's list of priority topics also overlaps with those it pursued during its previous G8 presidency, in 2006: international action to fight terrorism and regional conflict settlement.

According to statements by Russia's G8 sherpa, one 2014 priority will be to maximise the socioeconomic effect of the group's initiatives and decisions, including in the area of international security. In this regard, the sherpa underscored the need for investment, conditions for better employment, and innovative business models and activities². While this must be further fleshed out, the Russian presidency is also expected to continue the discussions from its 2013 G20 presidency (judged successful by many in moving key debates forward), as well as those related to the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) 2013 summit in Bali – fighting economic protectionism, protecting investments and reducing barriers to trade. A number of other issues have been highlighted: financial crimes, migration and international development assistance, promoting data openness, enhancing the effectiveness of the state through openness, promoting openness for prosperity and improving the quality of life. These themes also relate to the priorities of the UK's previous G8

¹ Russian G8 Presidency's official website, <http://en.g8russia.ru/>.

² *Ibid.*

presidency.

The need to adapt the global fight against drug trafficking, one of Russia's five core objectives, relates to Moscow's stated desire for the G8 to focus on 'new threats'. Russia has pointed to the limits of current approaches to drug trafficking, particularly in Latin America³, and has disagreed with those who advocate a less 'law enforcement-driven' approach. This debate was held during this year's World Economic Forum in Davos.

The issue of global terrorism is also expected to be linked to the issue of the civil war in Syria; the Russian G8 presidency has emphasised the threat posed by the religious and ideological radicalisation of the Syrian opposition, which it considers a major impediment to the country's emergence from the conflict.

In sum, the long list of the Russian G8 presidency's priorities appears designed to reconcile Russia's geostrategic interests with the legacy of its previous presidency, while aiming to strike a chord with its G8 partners. Time will tell whether the presidency will be able to deliver on this ambitious agenda. The G8 summit is scheduled to take place on 4-5 June 2014 in Sochi.

2. Members and organisation of the group

The eight country members of the G8 are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, the European Union is a full member of the G8 and is represented at the group's summits by the President of the European Commission and, since the entry into force of Lisbon Treaty, by the President of the European Council. But because the Union is a *sui generis* member, the group is still called the 'G8', and the EU can neither assume the presidency of G8 nor host its summits.

The group started as the G6 in 1975, with Canada joining in 1976 and Russia in 1997. Before the inclusion of Russia, the impetus for creating the group stemmed from a desire to create a flexible and operational platform to allow like-minded leaders of the world's most advanced nations to meet in relatively informal settings, to discuss pressing global problems and deal with crises. Since then, G8 summits have featured discussions on a wide range of topics, ranging from crisis management to peace and security, economic governance, development, public health issues and climate change.

In addition to the group's annual summits — hosted by the member state assuming the rotating G8 presidency that year — a number of meetings and events are held throughout the year, including agency-level meetings of public officials and high-ranking ministerial meetings. The sherpas assume responsibility for organising meetings and providing political direction. The G8 presidency establishes the venue and political priorities for the summits, fixes the calendar and oversees the group's administrative operations. In recent years, these summits have often been held outside capital cities, often in quite secluded locations, largely due to security concerns.

³ There is no common position on this in Latin America.

3. The parliamentary dimension of the G8

The Parliamentary dimension of G8 has been developing over the years, in the form of annual meetings of speakers from the parliaments of the G8 member states. The European Parliament has sent a high-level representative to these meetings – usually the EP President or a vice president. The EP has pushed to upgrade the role of parliaments in the G8 context over the years, proposing to align the agendas of speakers' meetings more closely with the priority topics discussed during the summits. The EP has also advocated scheduling the speakers' meetings prior to the summit, to better feed the speakers' insights into the summit's discussions.

While the Russian presidency has emphasised the importance of the G8's parliamentary dimension, the speakers' meeting has again been scheduled after the summit – not an ideal sequence for the speakers.

The Russian G8 presidency has expressed its commitment to boosting the parliamentary dimension of the G8. Russian President Vladimir Putin has stressed the importance of the parliamentary, civil society and youth preparatory 'tracks' of G8 (known as the 'Parliamentary 8', 'Civil 8' and 'Youth 8') as consultative bodies supporting and providing ideas to the presidency. Yet the programme of the 'Parliamentary 8' does not yet appear as well developed as these of the 'Civil 8' and 'Youth 8', which are well described on the official website of the Russian G8 presidency.

Various Russian and international civil society organisations have closely followed the progress of the 'Civil 8' track of the current Russian presidency. During Russia's previous presidency, in 2006, several consultative events did occur, but some NGOs subsequently complained that their input was not reflected in the final *communiqué*.

Significantly, the Russian G8 presidency has scheduled its speakers' meeting for 5-7 September in Moscow, well after the June Sochi summit – a schedule that detracts from the speakers' meeting potential impact.

4. The EU in the G8

The EU's role within the G8 is a delicate one: the Union represents those EU Member States who are not members of the G8, while seeking a common line among the EU members of the group. The EU is still searching for ways to assert itself more strongly at the G8.

The EU and G8 play a mutually supporting role, although the EU has yet to assert itself strongly as a G8 actor.

Studies have suggested that the EU and the G8 have yet to develop a common policy on key issues, and particularly on matters of peace and security⁴. On the other hand, the EU and G8 positions on the protection of human rights, democracy, development and the fight against poverty and corruption are very close⁵. The EU could certainly enhance its role and

⁴ Marina Larionova and Mark Rakhmangulov, 'Key Concepts for Exploring the Role of the European Union in the G8' in Marina Larionova (ed.) *The European Union in the G8: Promoting Consensus and Concerted Actions for Global Public Goods*.

⁵ Larionova and Rakhmangulov.

effectiveness within the G8; it could do more to represent the EU Member States not present at the table, as well as to liaise more closely with those EU Member States who are G8 members.

In conclusion, the G8 may serve as a platform for the EU to upgrade its status as a global actor. G8 decisions and commitments also have an important trickle-down effect on EU policy, which has been visible in a number of areas, such as development and climate.

5. The global view of the G8

The impact and effectiveness of the G8 has often been debated in recent years, with critical voices pointing to the elitist character of the platform, accused of not reflecting new geostrategic realities (such as rising powers). The group is also criticised for the poor implementation of the commitments made during its summits.

Nevertheless, recent summits have demonstrated the added value of the G8 as a platform working for consensus on topics including crisis management and sustainable development. While the admission of Russia to the G8 in 1997 may have eroded the cohesiveness of the group, it also facilitated high-level political dialogue on key foreign policy issues. The results of these discussions have been mixed. However, given recent events in the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhoods, pursuing dialogue with Russia on these issues appears more important than ever. The fact that Moscow will hold the group's presidency – a role that usually implies an effort to build consensus – suggests that June summit in Sochi may be productive.

The G8 has also been discussed in relation to the Group of 20⁶. For the moment, there is no formal arrangement between the two regarding their 'division of labour'. The G8 focuses predominantly, if not exclusively, on non-economic issues, tackling a range of topics, including peace and security, development, climate, crisis management and public health.

The G8 provides the EU an opportunity to assert its foreign policy positions on a global stage, forcing the Union to develop a suitable *modus operandi* in conjunction with participating Member States.

In turn, the platform offers the European Parliament an opportunity to push for its own voice to be heard on key issues, as well as to advocate the parliamentary dimension of global governance.

While the G8 has been criticised in the past for its elitist character and lack of effectiveness, it has also served as a consensus-building platform on issues ranging from crisis management to sustainable development.

⁶ G20 membership comprises Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and the European Union, represented by the President of the European Council, accompanied by the European Central Bank.

Annex I: Key events during the Russia's G8 presidency

27-28 January	Foreign Affairs Sous-Sherpas (FASS) Meeting	Moscow
28 -29 January	Political Directors Meeting	Moscow
1-28 February	1st Sherpas' Meeting	Moscow
12 February	1st Accountability Working Group Meeting	Moscow
13 February	1st G8 Health Experts' Group Meeting	Moscow
25 February	1st Ministerial Preparatory Meeting on Countering the World Drug Problem	Moscow
26-27 February	1st Nuclear Safety and Security Working Group Meeting	Moscow
27-28 February	1st Food Security Working Group Meeting	Moscow
18-19 March	2nd Accountability Working Group Meeting	Moscow
25 March	2rd Ministerial Preparatory Meeting on Countering the World Drug Problem	Moscow
1-30 April	Meeting of G8 Science Ministers and National Academies of Science Presidents'	Moscow
1-30 April	Meeting of the G8 Deputy Ministers of Science and Deputy Presidents of National Science Academies	Moscow
1-30 April	3rd Sherpas' Meeting	Moscow
1-30 April	Business 8 Summit	Kaliningrad St. Petersburg
7-8 April	2nd G8 Health Experts' Group Meeting	Moscow
11 April	1st Finance Ministers' Meeting	Washington
17-18 April	2nd Food Security Working Group Meeting	Moscow
22-23 April	3rd Accountability Working Group Meeting	Moscow
23 April - 24March	Development Ministers' Deputies Meeting	Moscow
24 April	3rd Ministerial Preparatory Meeting on Countering the World Drug Problem	Moscow
24-25 April	Global University Summit	Moscow
28 - 29 April	2nd Nuclear Safety and Security Working Group Meeting	Saint Petersburg
1-31 May	1st Deauville Partnership Transition Fund's Meeting	Egypt
1 - 31 May	1st Leadership Council Meeting of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition	Africa
12 - 13 May	IV Eastern Europe and Central Asia AIDS Conference	Moscow
12 - 13 May	Youth 8 Summit (Y8 Russia 2014)	Moscow
14 - 16 May	Civil 8 Summit, including Meeting on Open Government	Moscow
15 May	Ministerial Meeting on Countering the World Drug Problem	Moscow

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15-16 May	Development Ministers' Meeting	Moscow
20-21 May	3rd G8 Health Experts' Group Meeting	Geneva
28 May	Finance Sous-Sherpas' Meeting G8. Accountability Report's Presentation	Moscow
1-30 June	4th Sherpas' Meeting	Sochi
5 June	G8 Leaders' Summit	Sochi
130 September	G8 Parliament Speakers' Meeting	Moscow
130 September	2nd Leadership Council Meeting of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition	New York
30 Sept. - 1 October	International Workshop 'Insurance of Civil Liability for Inflicting Possible Damage when Operating Hazardous Production Facilities'	Sochi
1-31 October	2nd Deauville Partnership Transition Fund's Meeting	Moscow
1 - 31 October	Conference on Development Agenda with Deauville Partnership countries' participation	Moscow
10 October	2nd Finance Ministers' Meeting	Washington
27 - 28 October	3rd Nuclear Safety and Security Working Group Meeting	Moscow
29 - 31 October	International Workshop 'Lessons Learned from the IAEA Integrated Regulatory Review Service (IRRS)'	Moscow
1-30 November	5th Sherpas' Meeting	Russia
19-21 November	International Workshop on Regulatory Control on Nuclear Legacy Sites and Radioactive Waste Management	Moscow

Annex II: CV of the Russian G8 Sherpa Alexei KVASOV



Alexei G. KVASOV was appointed Russian Sherpa of the G8 by the Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation on 25 June 25 2012.

Background

2012	Deputy Chief of Presidential Experts' Directorate, Russian G8 Sherpa, Executive Office of the President of the Russian Federation
2011-2012	Aide to the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation (Igor Shuvalov)
2011	Aide to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation on international development, economic and financial issues (Aleksei Kudrin)
2002-2010	Executive Director for the Russian Federation, The World Bank Group
2000-2002	Deputy Director, North American Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
1996-2000	Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Chile
1991-96	First Deputy Director; Chief of Economic Division; North-American Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
1978-90	Director for Research and Planning; Senior Researcher; Assistant Researcher; Post-graduate, Institute of the USA and Canada Studies, Academy of Sciences of the USSR

Education

2005	Executive Education Program, J.F.Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (Boston, MA, USA)
1984	Ph.D. (Economics), Institute of the USA and Canada Studies, Academy of Sciences of the USSR
1978	M.A. (Economics) <i>Cum laude</i> , Moscow State University