

# Time to press the reset button



**RUSSIA IS** a fascinating country. And it becomes even more interesting when you share a 1300-kilometre border with it.

Russia is Finland's biggest trading partner. Russians top our tourism and immigration lists. Russian foreign policy has implications on our security and political decisions. To put it simply, we care what happens across the border.

**Russia is** currently going through three changes. The first has to do with the economy. The Russian economic miracle is over and the global economic downturn will hit it hard.

Russia's share of the world economy is relatively small, only three per cent. Compare that to the European Union and the United States, which each account for about 30 per cent of the world's economy.

Growth in Russia was based on high energy prices.

Unfortunately, Russia did not seize the moment during the good years. It failed to modernise its economy, which will be much harder to do during the current financial crisis. There is no "Russian Nokia," an equivalent to the Finnish mobile phone success story.

The second change is linked to domestic politics. Economic growth from 2000 to 2008 led to relative political stability. No one knows what will happen during the global economic downturn. How will Russians react to the new situation? How will the administration cope with possible political unrest?

Russian foreign policy is the third strand of change. Here, there's some reason for optimism. The current economic crisis offers possibilities. It

has brought Europe, the US and Russia closer together. The new American administration has started the process of reconciliation, and the Russians have responded. That's good news.

**I believe** that a window of opportunity is opening between the West and Russia. We must, however, be realistic in our expectations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union many believed that Russia would embrace a Western-style liberal democracy combined with a social market economy. Few realised that our ability

to shape Russia was limited: the world's largest country was never ours to lose.

As Russia grew richer it became more assertive. We played the economic card, Russia focused on reinstating its position as

a superpower. The result was that we became economically closer, but our political distance grew.

**So, what** should we do? For starters we should broaden our agenda with Russia. We should move beyond security and focus on cooperating on the economy, multilateral institutions and climate change.

It is important that the EU, the US and Russia tackle the global agenda together. Our goal should be a genuine, open partnership. My colleagues US secretary of state Hillary Clinton and Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov have pressed the "reset" button. Europe's finger should be on that button too. That's a good start. ■

**The window of opportunity is opening between the West and Russia.**

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