

## How Biden should reach out to Russia

(Open letter by Ruut Veenhoven and Ad Bergsma, published without the graph in [The Independent](#), 30-03-2022)

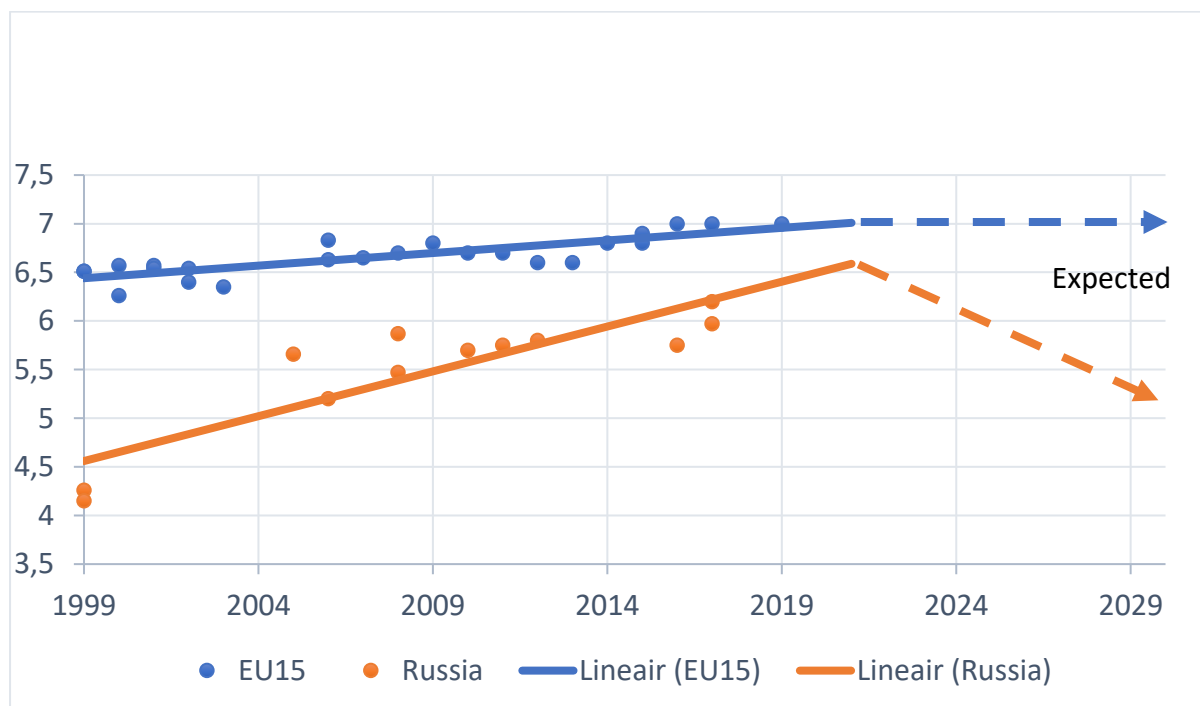
*President Biden calls his colleague from Russia a 'war criminal' and a 'butcher', but denies that he seeks a regime change. Every psychologist would advise Biden to find common ground his adversary instead. In this open letter two happiness researchers focus on the east's and the west's common interest in the life satisfaction of the Russian population.*

Dear Mr Putin,

We assume that you are concerned with the happiness of the Russian people. In that context we suggest to consider the following results from scientific research, available in the [World Database of Happiness](#).

Average happiness rose in Russia after you took office in 1999 and was nearing the level in the European Union as you can see in the figure below.

**Figure: Average happiness of citizens in [Russia](#) and [15 EU countries](#)<sup>1</sup> since 1999**



We expect a strong decline of happiness for the Russian population if you continue the war in Ukraine, for the following reasons.

- Russian happiness will decline when the material [standard of living falls](#) as a result of international sanctions and the cost of war.
- Russian happiness will also decline when the war presses to further [restrictions in freedom](#) in the country.

- A military victory will not offer a remedy, since [national pride does not increase happiness very much](#), while the likely continuation in a [civil war](#) with guerilla and terrorism will certainly decrease Russian happiness.
- A restauration of the Russian empire will not add to happiness either, because people live happier in smaller countries. On the [rank list of average happiness in nations](#) the USA ranks 46<sup>th</sup> and below most western nations, while China (60<sup>th</sup>) and Russia (101<sup>th</sup>) rank below the world average. Enlarging Russia will not result in happier Russians.

The decline in Russian happiness will also have indirect consequences to be considered.

- Economic recovery will be delayed since [unhappiness lowers performance at work](#).
- Russians will live shorter lives since [unhappy people die earlier](#).
- The current political order will be contested since [unhappy people are less supportive](#) and more often [break rules](#). Decline of happiness in the population sets the scene for political [protest](#), as was the case in the [Arab Spring](#).

We expect no decline in average happiness in the European Union, but foresee a pause in the rising trend. Happiness wise, war is a losing game; even if you are on the site with the best arms.

Happiness may not be everything, but should not be ignored.

Sincerely

Prof. Dr. [Ruut Veenhoven](#) and Dr. [Ad Bergsma](#)

Ruut Veenhoven works at the [Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organization](#) (EHERO) of Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

---

<sup>1</sup> The 15 EU member-states in 1999 were: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, UK and Sweden.