



WORKING PAPER
FINAL VERSION

The future of EU – Russian relations

The importance of Russia as a partner for the EU cannot be underestimated. An economically healthy and a politically stable Russia, reliable as a neighbour, political partner and energy supplier is in the best interest of the European Union. An unstable, undemocratic Russia could become a major security threat for the whole continent, not only because of political troubles, but also as a potential source of organized crime, terrorism, weapons smuggling, illegal migration and environmental hazards.

The basis for co-operation

Russian EU-membership is not an issue today. Neither side is expressing interest in developing this option. The EU and Russia should be regarded as two equal partners, both in need of extensive co-operation. The EU policy towards Russia should be based on defending human rights and international law. It has to be emphasized that only a uniform approach towards Russia by all EU leaders can bring the desired effects. In the past, bilateral concessions and dissenting voices among the EU leadership have seriously undermined attempts at adopting a common stance towards Russia.

Promoting democracy

The EU must be concerned about undemocratic tendencies in Russia. The EU should pay special attention to Chechnya and Russian policy in this region. The unresolved Chechen problem may breed destabilization in Russia and contribute to the growth of adverse tendencies elsewhere in the country.

Europe has currently very little influence on events in Russia. It is clear that any attempts to introduce sanctions to discourage undemocratic reforms would be ineffective and counter-productive. The Russians must work out their own political and economic system. However, Europeans should not refrain from criticizing those developments that are not in line with our core values.

Borders and visa

Russia wants visa-free traffic to and from the countries of the Community, and this issue is bound to become increasingly significant for the EU's relations with the Russian Federation in the upcoming years. Contrary to the general belief, the key problem here is not the tightening of Russian borders. However, combatting

cross-border crime, human trafficking and illegal immigration remain key challenges. This, however, requires modernization of the border infrastructure and closer co-operation between police and justice authorities on both sides of this border. In addition, Russia would have to modernize and enhance its passport system, as presently large numbers of documents are being forged.

It is in the EU's own interest to encourage more Russians to visit the EU, especially at a time when young Russians are becoming more nationalistic and suspicious of the West. The EU should streamline Schengen visa requirements and cut bureaucracy. It should build a database of previous visits, so that business people, academics and representatives of civil society organizations no longer have to prove their identity and intention for each new visit.

Economic co-operation

The key issue in the EU's relation with Russia is economic co-operation, the trade in natural resources in particular. Progress in this respect depends mostly on the solution of a number of very specific issues: the price of energy resources in the internal Russian market, making Russian gas pipelines available to producers independent of Gazprom and the future of long-term contracts for the supply of Russian gas to EU countries. The prospective Russian membership in the World Trade Organization will have a significant impact on this relationship in the future.

Pursuing an interactive dialogue

Russia and the EU both have high political ambitions that can lead to conflicts of interest. In order to reach a solution for a wide array of issues, the EU could propose an interactive dialogue, i.e. agreeing upon mutually binding principles and harmonization of selected areas of legislation. Elements of such dialogue have already been implemented and have proved very effective in the relations between Moscow and the EU. For example, the issue of transit to Kaliningrad was solved in a compromise based on a flexible interpretation of the EU visa regulations.

Regional co-operation

As the Governments of Russia's European neighbours are acquiring greater freedom in the exercise of an independent foreign policy, they are increasingly looking toward the EU for leadership, to the perceived expense of Russia. This evolution will lead to friction between Brussels and Moscow in the years to come. In dealing with these frictions, the EU must not compromise on the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. By supporting quasi-authoritarian regimes and recognizing falsified election results, Russia goes to great lengths to try and block the democratization efforts in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. This is simply not acceptable. The EU should remain engaged in Eastern Europe with one clear perspective: bringing the new Eastern neighbours

closer to the Union. At the same time this strategy cannot be aimed at humiliating Russia. Treating this situation in the region as an ordinary turf war between two blocs will not lead to stable solutions for the region.

Kaliningrad

Another issue in Moscow – Brussels relations that deserves special attention is the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. The approach of both parties to this issue has come to symbolize their openness to mutual collaboration in general. Hence, it would be reasonable for the EU to continue to pay close attention to issues concerning the enclave. Because of the symbolic significance of this cooperation, the approach of the EU policy towards Kaliningrad is enormously important and might be a decisive factor in EU–Russian relations in general.

Partnership for increased nuclear safety

YEPP is concerned about the large number of discarded nuclear weapons and obsolete reactors that are stored in unsafe conditions and are not being maintained. Russia needs to take more responsibility in ensuring that the region will not experience another nuclear catastrophe. Additionally, the EU should be an active partner in helping Russia destroy such weapons and reactors by contributing with economic aid and technical assistance.

The situation of Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia

The governments of Estonia and Latvia have implemented policies to integrate the large Russian-speaking community in their country. Russia has on numerous occasions protested against these measures within the OSCE, the Council of Europe and towards the EU, claiming that Latvia and Estonia are in breach of human rights.

Instead of trying to prevent the implementation of the integration process, the Russian Federation should assist in ensuring that the Russian-speaking communities can become equal partners in the Baltic societies.