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The Black Sea Regional Cooperation in the Context of the EU-Russia Relations

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Introduction

The EU-Russia relations are essential for the Black Sea cooperation. One of the realities in the region is the growing role of EU that has become a center of gravitation for the majority of the regional countries who are subjected to a fatal attraction of integration and cooperation towards the greater EU area because of economic as well as political reasons. The EU has different formats of relations with the regional countries: Greece, Bulgaria and Romania are member states, Turkey is a candidate for EU membership, Russia for the time being has the lowest format of relations – PCA and the post-Soviet regional countries are included in ENP.

Russia still remains one of the key players in the region. Half of the BSEC countries came out of the USSR and they have troubled relations with Russia (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan) or among them (Armenia and Azerbaijan). Russia's potential in the region can be either positive or negative which depends on the evolution of her relations with European Union and the West at large.

Undoubtedly, any regional cooperation is very important for the EU-Russia relations. It plays a role of an additional pillar to the international relations helping to retain and develop the positive achievements of the last 15 years. Thus Russia's participation and contacts in the BSEC format as well as Northern Dimension Initiative created an additional framework for political dialogue at the regional level. At the same time it would be naïve to think that such cooperation will be flourishing if fundamental problems in the EU-Russia relations are not resolved. Even during the Cold War, the USSR and the West were able to cooperate in many spheres, notably in trade and arms control but it made little difference to the overall nature and character of these relations. Without a break-through in the EU-Russia relations the Black Sea regional cooperation will be curtailed and reduced to a very narrow and selective cooperation if in interests coincide and it will take a form of "foot in the door" policies when these interests diverge.

I. Crisis as a situation of uncertainty

In spite of Russia and the EU having common interests in many spheres, above all in the international security and energy sectors, and continuing intensive contacts, including the Russia-EU summits, one of the most fashionable topics in academic discussions today is whether there is a crisis in the relations between two partners. If one defines a crisis as the threat of a collapse in EU-Russia relations, there is no crisis, because the interdependence of the two partners is rather high. If we agree to define a crisis as a turning point, a condition of uncertainty leading to a decisive change, we should recognise that there is a crisis in EU-Russia relations due to an absence of clear strategic goals and mutual trust. The partners have approached a fork in the road and it is not clear whether they will travel together or take divergent paths.

The crisis has not arisen overnight. Many of the problems that have appeared in Russia-EU relations after the disintegration of the USSR have acquired a qualitative character. The expectations of each side with regard to the other have not been fulfilled. The EU expected that Russia would build a functioning democracy and introduce market economy reforms overnight. Russia expected cooperation with the European Union to deliver an economic miracle and help her find a proper place in post-Cold War Europe.

Both partners are still undergoing deep internal transformations. After the French and the Dutch “no” to the European Constitution, the European Union is undergoing a deep internal crisis which consists of three elements: the crisis of its previous strategy based on simultaneous and supposedly painless implementation of two key processes of European integration – widening and deepening; the crisis over its institutions; and the legitimacy crisis that embodies a growing gap between political elites in EU countries and their respective electorates. In order to re-launch a new integration strategy the EU needs stability on its borders. From this point of view Russia is one of the most important neighbours of the European Union because stability in the post-Soviet space and in Europe at large will depend on Russia’s domestic transformation.

Russia is still in the process of re-establishing her statehood and international position after the chaos of the first decade of post-Communist evolution. President Putin has never made a secret of the fact that he is going to build a strong state, reduce the informal influences established under Yeltsin and to strengthen the integrity of the Russian Federation. This has been basically accepted by the EU and the United States, who were becoming tired of Russia’s controversial development under Yeltsin. At the same time and on many occasions, Vladimir Putin has reaffirmed Russia’s European vocation and her readiness to promote market economy reforms. EU still ranks high in Russia’s foreign policy agenda.

The future of EU-Russia relations will depend a great deal on what the EU countries with a long history of democracy want from a Russia still involved in the painful process of transition from communism that began only 15 years ago. Lack of trust in Russia, which can be partly put down to the legacy of the past and partly to Russia’s present development, induces the EU to distance itself from its eastern neighbour and perceive it chiefly in terms of “oil, gas and nuclear weapons”. One has the impression that Russia is being forced to rely on the energy export because there are powerful interests not only inside Russia, but also in the West which would like Russia to be stuck with that kind of orientation. The main question that is exercising the West boils down to just one question: “Will you give us enough oil and gas?” If this approach prevails in the EU, it will have dramatic consequences for Russia’s internal evolution and could lead to a scenario in which EU-Russia relations are trapped between cooperation and confrontation. An economy that relies on export of raw materials is by the same token a model of an authoritarian political system, a model that leads to greater stratification of society and the region, a model that leads to a policy of dominance in the post-Soviet space because it is necessary to secure the transit pipelines. It is a model which at the end of the day leads to reorientation towards Asia because the markets there are more stable and more promising in the long term. If the EU needs Russia as a stable and reliable partner, there needs to be a totally different scenario, more beneficial to European and international security not to mention the European Union and Russia themselves.

II. The Munich speech as a watershed

The future of the EU-Russia relations will depend not only on the ability of two partners to resolve their problems but also on the international context because two partners do not exist in a vacuum and their political will and readiness to find compromises will be strongly influence by the trends in Russia’s relations with the West. From this point of view the Munich speech of president Putin can be regarded as a certain watershed in Russia’s relations

with the West. It was assessed by many Western political analysts as a kind of ultimatum. But it was not so much an ultimatum but rather a message to Russia's partners. Undoubtedly, the Munich speech reflects a creeping deterioration of the Russia-West relations. This can be explained by four reasons.

First, Russia's course to reconsider the model of the Russia-West relations established in the 90s and based on unilateral concessions of Russia which is not acceptable now. Russia's Western partners who got accustomed to a low profile foreign policy of Russia of the 90s regard this turn with suspicion. But the fact is that notwithstanding the underlying reasons, Russia feels getting stronger both domestically and internationally while her partners are passing through a difficult period of reassessment of their previous positions.

Second. The New American Mission concept of the USA who on many occasions demonstrated total disregard to international law, arms control, positions and interests of its partners. In this connection, Russia has some bones to pick with the European NATO members, most of whom are members of the European Union, which explains the turn of the Russian military policy against NATO expansion in Europe. Why was Europe so diffident when the US wrecked the disarmament treaties which formed the basis of global security? All the European states, including Russia, had ratified the nuclear test ban treaty (CTBT), which the US has not ratified. Why didn't the European allies bring any pressure to bear on the US over this issue? It is now obvious that if the Treaty had come into force the situation with North Korea would have been different. The West, including the EU countries, has lost all interest in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE Treaty). The fact that Poland and Check Republic are considering the issue of hosting elements of the American ABM system, even though this concern is exaggerated in Russia, is universally perceived in a negative sense.

Third. Rivalry in the CIS space. Lack of strategic goals in the relations with Russia, along with an active policy of EU and NATO eastward enlargement, inevitably strengthened and continue to strengthen the protective and "great power" sentiments within the Russian political elite, and its fears that the West is about to "squeeze" Moscow out of the zone of its vital interests – the CIS. The expansion of the EU, initially perceived as an objective process in the development of the post-bipolar Europe, today is increasingly perceived by many in Russia as a source of new challenges, and not only in connection with the Kaliningrad problem (the territorial integrity of Russia, passenger and cargo transit, etc), but also rivalry throughout the post-Soviet space.

Traditionally Brussels presented the enlargement of the EU and NATO to the East as mutually complementary processes. Although membership of NATO is not a precondition for membership of the EU according to the Copenhagen Criteria, the latest wave of European Union enlargement to the post-communist countries of Central Europe shows that de facto it has become the necessary precondition for the EU membership. First these countries become part of the security system of the West and only then can they count on membership in the EU. With regard to the CIS the continuation of this practice will give rise to serious problems in the relations with Russia and strengthen confrontation trends in Europe. In other words, the proclaimed principle of mutual "complementarity" of the enlargement of the EU and NATO is openly and dangerously at odds with Russia's interests in the post-Soviet space. It provides

a justification for the anti-Western policy of those forces in Russia which now say bluntly that one of the main goals of national security is confronting and defending Russia against NATO which is expanding towards our borders and may absorb Ukraine, Moldavia and Georgia.

Fourth, the last but not least – Russia’s domestic evolution. Russia is being judged by its partners by the highest standards of democracy which do not exist even in the leading EU countries not to mention the new members. The wide spread stereotype is that there is a gap in values between Russia and the EU. It looks that the gap is not in values but rather in democratic experiences of Russia and EU countries. Russia came out of the USSR only 16 years ago while the EU countries enjoy centuries of democratic experience. Democracy was developing in these countries in a natural and consistent way expanding from above to wider layers of population. Russia after the collapse of the USSR had to resolve many problems at once - to create a democratic foundation for its institutions and promote market economy reforms. Looking back in time one cannot but recognize that the first decade of its transformation was very uneven but at the same time one should recognize that we have already achieved a lot. During these 16 years we passed through the stage of the initial accumulation of the capital, the stage of the oligarchic capitalism and entered the stage of the state monopoly capitalism that the EU countries had passed 50-60 year ago.

How should one deal with a Russia that is far from perfect? It would be worthwhile to remember the advice given by George Kennan in 1951 in his article “America and the Russian Future” where he predicted the collapse of the USSR: “ when Soviet power has run its course, or when its personalities and spirit begin to change (for the ultimate outcome could be one or the other), let us not hover nervously over the people who come after, applying litmus papers daily to their political complexions to find out whether they answer to our concept of "democratic." Give them time; let them be Russians; let them work out their internal problems in their own manner. The ways by which peoples advance toward dignity and enlightenment in government are things that constitute the deepest and most intimate processes of national life. There is nothing less understandable to foreigners, nothing in which foreign interference can do less good. There are, as we shall see presently, certain features of the future Russian state that are of genuine concern to the outside world. But these do not include the form of government itself, provided only that it keep within certain well-defined limits, beyond which lies totalitarianism.”

III. The legal format of the EU-Russia relations: in a vicious circle

In 2007, the EU and Russia will have to agree on the future of the PCA – either to extend the existing or slightly modified treaty or sign a new agreement. The PCA was first offered to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in 1994-1995 as the lowest legal form of relations between the EU and third countries. The PCA still remains the main legal document for Russia-EU cooperation but both parties recognise that it is now outdated. The PCA model represents a purely technocratic approach by the EU to Russia and other post-Soviet states and bypasses the question of strategic goals. Beyond this the PCA neither fully reflects the substantial changes that have taken place in Russia, the EU and the world, nor the experience, achievements and new areas of cooperation. Russia’s membership of the WTO will deprive the PCA section on trade of any real meaning. As for political relations, the last decade of Russia-EU political cooperation has gone far beyond the limits of the PCA and regardless of

mutual dissatisfaction, Russia and the EU closely cooperate on the most urgent problems of international security, be it Iran or the unresolved question of Kosovo's status.

As the date approached for EU enlargement to the CEE countries, Brussels was confronted by the problem of its eastern borders and the necessity of defining its policy vis-a-vis Russia and other areas in the post-Soviet European space. At the St. Petersburg Summit in May 2003, the EU and Russia agreed to reinforce their co-operation by creating four long-term 'common spaces' within the framework of the PCA a common economic space; a common space for freedom, security and justice; a space for co-operation in the field of external security; and a space for research and education, including cultural aspects. The decisions of the St. Petersburg summit demonstrated the parties' resolve to elevate the level of cooperation without changing the legal foundation. The fact is that the idea of four common spaces for cooperation cannot be implemented on the basis of an outdated and narrow agreement. The Moscow Summit in May 2005 adopted a single package of road maps to act as the short and medium-term instruments for the creation and implementation of the four Common Spaces. The London Summit in October 2005 focused on the practical implementation of the Road Maps. But despite the good intentions these road maps are too technical and cannot provide the necessary foundation for the implementation of the St. Petersburg initiative. Their development can be assessed more as a process than a progress.

The Brussels strategy vis-à-vis the post-Soviet space has been further developed within the framework of the EU Neighbourhood Policy, a policy directed at the stabilisation of the Union's immediate neighbourhood. In the first draft ("Communication on Wider Europe"), which was criticised in Russian political and academic circles, Russia was put in a group with Southern Mediterranean countries. This draft did not define any clear priorities for the EU's neighbourhood, which was regarded as one integral space. The final draft ("The EU Neighbourhood Policy") has entirely excluded Russia from EU strategy. This document defines Russia as an EU strategic partner but it says that EU-Russia relations will be built around the St.-Petersburg decision on four common spaces of cooperation.

What is the balance sheet of EU-Russia relations? We have the outdated PCA, the brilliant St. Petersburg initiative, which cannot be implemented on the basis of an outdated PCA and the EU Neighbourhood Policy that excludes Russia and refers to the St. Petersburg initiative as a foundation for strategic partnership, which as has been demonstrated cannot advance within the present framework without major changes. It looks as though EU-Russia relations are now trapped in a vicious circle.

The only way to get out of this vicious circle is to create a new legal foundation for the St. Petersburg decision that, if implemented could upgrade the level of the EU-Russia partnership and tackle other problems, the energy dialogue and the CIS space included. Upgrading relations between Russia and the EU, drawing closer not only on the basis of common interests but also of common values, would remove or greatly diminish the chances of a clash of interests in the territory of the CIS (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldavia and Byelorussia). In other words, the stability of greater Europe and the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation, the regional cooperation included, hinges on how the "2007 problem" will be solved. Without a new legal form of relationship, the EU's potential enlargement to the CIS space will be opposed by Russia, a contrast to her initially positive attitude towards the EU's widening strategy.

IV. The Black Sea Cooperation

Another important condition for promoting the regional cooperation and preventing conflicts between Russia and the EU in this region would be the launching of a new initiative - a functional approach to cooperation between the regional countries. Such an approach could be provided by a Pact of New Cooperation (Stability Pact for the Black Sea region) in key areas of the economy the energy sector above all, internal and external security and science. A functional approach to equal cooperation of all the interested states would help to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines in this region. It does not challenge the existence of other regional associations, notably the Russia-NATO Council (although its prospects have faded), EurAsEC, the CSTO, the SCO, while offering a new format of cooperation for all the interested states. Herein lies one of the advantages of the proposed approach which works across regions and multilateral organizations.

In this connection it would seem important to reformat the Russia-EU agenda on the four common spaces identifying five priority areas: in the sphere of energy, internal security, external security, military-political and military-technical cooperation and science. The difference between this approach and the existing approaches to cooperation of Russia and other CIS countries with Euro-Atlantic institutions consists precisely in making the agenda as concrete as possible, concentrating resources on the main issues and conducting intensive negotiations with clearly set goals and deadlines. The range of participants in these projects should be determined by the principle of “flexible geometry”, that is, it should not assume automatic participation of all the states in these projects. The implementation of these projects would contribute to greater security, economic prosperity and democracy in the region and in Europe as a whole.

BSEC can be seen as a potential positive influence in regional cooperation and the main working structure. Its role should be strengthened and adjusted to new realities. The role of BSEC in developing regional infrastructures and cooperating in sensitive sectors undoubtedly provides advantages to the EU, Russia and other regional countries. It would be expedient to think about inclusion of new members in the BSEC – Germany and Italy above all who have good relations with Russia and who have interests in the regional cooperation.

The EU-Russia May summit in Samara will be a difficult one due to the burden of the mutual dissatisfaction and accumulated problems. Generally speaking the short-term trends in the relations between Russia and the EU give little ground for optimism, although in the long term neither Europe nor Russia can be independent centers of power in the modern and emerging global situation. So, integration as a joint strategy on all levels meets the interests of both partners and indeed the interests of international security in the broadest sense of that word.