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## RUSSIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: CHANGING APPROACHES FROM PERCEPTION TO TOUGH OPPOSITION

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**Abstract.** In the article are highlighted the results of theoretical analysis of Russia's attitude towards European integration. The analysis unveiled the historical, cognitive and discursive sources of Russia's unwillingness to join the EU. Researcher reveals some theories of scientists to study the problem of Russian national conception and its influence on Russian-EU relations. For depth scientific analysis the emphasis is made on evolution of Russia's perception towards European Union integration process.

**Keywords:** Russia, European Union, integration, EU enlargement, national role conception, foreign policy.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The key issue of the Russian policy towards the EU is the Russian perception of the EU and the process of the European integration. The fact that the democratic legal order within the EU is equal to the political order, with all individual members enjoying the same rights, is ignored. Russia supports a strong Europe as a counterbalance to the US dominance on the one hand, but it fears that the integrated Europe would push it out of the European space.

The rivalry between Russia and the EU primarily stems from a collision of their interests: Russia struggles to protect its sphere of influence whereas Europe continues to expand. Moscow's greatest fears concern that the European political activity shifts towards the Commonwealth of Independent States and that, in a long-term perspective, some of these states, particularly Ukraine, would accede to the EU. This process is reinforced by the conflicting political values, as both actors' political orders continue to evolve in opposite directions.

The EU – Russian relations are grounded in research works by W. Baranowskij [2], V. Benes [3], T. Bordachev [4], A. Bryc [5], T. Jur'jewa [7], M. Kaczmarek [8], S. Karaganow [9; 10], O. Lazebnikova [11], A. Makarychev [12; 13], V. Mizin [14], A. Polyakova [16], L. Póti [17; 18], I. Torbakov [22], T. Zonova [23], and others.

## 2. RESULTS

First of all, let's briefly analyze Russia's attitude towards European integration when this process just began and Russia itself was a part of the USSR.

The process of European integration was launched starting in 1948. It has proved that not only sovereign states can find satisfactory peaceful solutions to long-term disputes which had previously led to devastating conflicts, but also how they can explore opportunities through mutually beneficial cooperation rather than traditional competition.

It is not surprising that the reaction of the USSR towards the ongoing process of the West European integration has been very cautious. Moscow regarded those processes with great and ever-growing suspicion as the consolidation of opposing economic and military potentials and a kind of springboard for its archrival the USA. The plan to create two new closed organizations in Europe, according to the USSR point of view, would inevitably lead to further deepening of the division of Europe.

The "Schuman declaration" of 9 May 1950 was assessed as part of a plan aimed at the remilitarization of West Germany and the revival of German imperialism, incompatible with the interests of preserving peace in Europe. The European Coal and Steel Community was seen as a step towards the formation of economic bloc analogue of the aggressive NATO bloc. They stressed that all the activities of the "Common market" and the Euratom would be subordinated to the interests of NATO while West Germany would be dragged more deeply into the system of closed military groupings of the Western powers [23, p. 1].

Thus we can conclude that any attempts to unite European countries were seen by the USSR through the prism of ideological stereotypes of those years. The European integration was considered as an attempt to strengthen the position of world imperialism against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries as well as against international workers and national liberation movements.

Soviet ideologists tried to ensure that the inter-imperialist contradictions would inevitably lead to the disintegration of the EEC (the European Economic Community). On the basis of this ideological assumption, the Soviet government failed to recognize the EEC as a political reality and did not consider the possibility of establishing official relations with it.

Later Khrushchev's "Thaw" marks a turning point in the attitude towards the European Community. On May 23, 1962 the main official newspaper "Pravda" published an article in which it was recognized that EC "certainly is a political and economic reality" [23, p. 1].

On March 20, 1972 the CPSU General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev in his address to the XV Congress of Soviet Trade Unions stressed that "the Soviet Union did not ignore the real situation in Western Europe and the existence of an economic grouping of capitalist countries known as the "Common Market" [20].

At the end of 1984, when Mikhail Gorbachev, defined Europe as "our common home". Gorbachev spoke about the readiness to recognize EEC not only as an economic union, but also as a political reality.

After the USSR collapsed the first Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation (1992) stated goals coincided with the foreign policy objectives carried out in the USSR during the "perestroika" period like openness to the West, the establishment of relations with NATO and the European Union [21]. It is worth mentioning that the development of relations with the EU has been the priority of Russian foreign policy from its very beginning.

With regard to Russia's international orientation, during the early years, the main dividing line was between two schools of thought, whose debate relatively soon resulted in a kind of synthesis that has become the mainstream school of thought determining the official course as well.

The first approach can be labeled as Atlantist, Westernizer, or liberal internationalist. According to this school, Russia is an organic part of European civilization; its interests are close to or identical with the West; the quickest possible integration into the European and world communities is desired; relations with the West should be accorded the highest priority; Russia does not have any enemies; and it does not want to be a global power.

The second school of thought—usually labeled as Eurasianist—claims that Russia is neither part of European nor Asian civilization, but is a special mixture of the two; its interests differ from the West; and Russia should not be integrated into Europe, but rather it should be the center of integration itself for the region surrounding it. Relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries should be its top priority; Russia should stick to its great power status; and it does have enemies. The debate between these schools of thought has brought about a synthesis of the two philosophies called “geopolitical realism,” which by 1993–94 had begun to dominate political discourse [11].

The key document laying down the framework of the Russia-EU relationships was the ‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between Russia and the European Union’ (PCA) adopted June 24, 1994. It entered into force December 1, 1997, and contained a declaration of an intense cooperation of both parties, with no assumption that Russia would become a member of the EU.

However, in 1990<sup>s</sup>, the Russian government did not exclude a possibility of Russia’s potential membership in the EU. But lately the RF politics regarding the EU underwent a noteworthy evolution as compared to the era of Boris Yeltsin.

Actually, it’s hard to even imagine the possibility of Russia itself joining the EU according to its national conception. Russia has struggled to achieve great power status in the historical European society of states and considered itself superior on transcendental and moral grounds and “the problem was that this self-understanding was not shared by any other political entity” [15, p. 42].

This self-appointed higher moral status lies at the core of the Russian messianic, universalist and global national role conception and manifests itself through the quest for the salvation and redemption of Europe. And such a nature of the Russian national role conception, the self-proclaimed Russian moral superiority over Europe and responsibility for Europe do prevent Russia from pursuing or even considering the entrance into the EU as an acceptable alternative [3].

Russian messianism focuses first and foremost on Europe. Russia, as a bearer of traditional European values, feels obliged to guard Europe both against external threats and internal degeneration. In such a context, the EU tends to be viewed as a faceless materialist and bureaucratic entity lacking a soul and a subjectivity [12, p. 22]. Thus, the membership in the earthly, temporal or even rotten EU, that has too often deflected from her true spirit and values, does not make much sense for Russia and can be interpreted as a renunciation of the status of a moral authority (on the global stage and vis-a-vis Europe).

Continually Russian elites (tsarist, bolshevik and contemporary) cherish a noble and distant dream of a genuine ‘European project’ (like the Holy Alliance and the Comintern). But this universalist quest cannot be accomplished by entering the existing structures of European “integration”. Assessed through the prism of the Russian elite’s national role conception, it makes more sense for Russia to initiate such a project by herself [13, p. 8]. That’s why in 2003, Russia intensified its campaign for the integration of the post-Soviet area, which was expressed by the conception of a Common Economic Space (CES). As a consequence, an idea emerged to strengthen Russia’s position through an activity in the two economic areas: the EU and the CIS, the latter serving also as a way to prevent the CIS members from integrating with the EU.

Returning to the evolution of Russia’s perception towards EU enlargement, it’s worth mentioning, that from the very beginning of mutual relations, Russia considered the EU chiefly as the economic partner, underestimating the political dimension of the integration. It expected that if the Union becomes self-dependent, the American position would weaken.

Plans to include the countries of the former Eastern bloc within the EU were not seen by Russia as a threat to its interests. Moreover, in the context of NATO’s enlargement, some Russians regarded them as an advantageous alternative. Moscow identified the growing autonomy of European security policy only in the context of the deteriorating role of NATO, which made Russia support Western European Union’s initiatives, hoping that it would eventually become self-dependent [5, p. 77].

Establishing close relations with Europe, at the beginning of Putin’s presidency, to a certain extent revealed the Russian view on the European integration. The key issue seems to be whether the Kremlin aims at active participation in the integration processes, with a suggestion of its potential membership

in the EU. Although in 1990<sup>s</sup> Russia claimed that it observed the same values as the West – under Putin, commentators refer to a Russian variety of democracy and the common interests rather than the shared values [22].

Nevertheless, in April 2000, in his annual address, President Putin stated, “the importance of further efforts to form a partnership with the European Union is growing. The course of integration with Europe is becoming one of the key directions of our foreign policy” [19].

Although, it should be definitely stressed, that the Russian interpretation of the notion of integration differs significantly from the Western and Central European interpretations of this term. In Western and Central Europe, integration means—in its classical sense—formation of a community of states in which national sovereignty is relative, in order to reach a new quality of relations among the members. The Russian interpretation is much looser, meaning not to be left out of international (European) organizations; that is, to avoid isolation.

That is why the RF intended to support the creation of a common economic space without the loss of sovereignty, which is sometimes thought to be directly associated with the EU membership.

In October 22, 2000 Moscow presented the ‘Russian Federation Middle Term Strategy Towards the European Union (2000 –2010)’ during Russia-EU summit in Helsinki. Russian priorities included: imparting a strategic dimension to the relations, guarantying Russia’s interests in the process of EU enlargement, the inflow of investment and increasing the access of Russian goods to EU markets. The RF did not claim to join or to form an association with the EU [7].

Russia has expressed its will to establish the partnership with the EU, but, firstly, the Russian way of understanding a ‘partnership’ is quite specific, and secondly, the Kremlin would like to build it on the basis of common interests (but not on the basis of shared values). Moscow wants to be treated exceptionally by the EU – as a superpower with a great natural resources potential. In terms of concrete postulates, Russia insisted upon introducing a visafree regime for Russians in the EU, an access to the common market in the framework of the CES and a voice in the decision-making process [6].

The issue of a possible integration with the EU also constitutes the question of Russia’s identity in the international arena. Should one speak of it as the return of a ‘prodigal son’ to Europe or – due to a unique Eurasian identity, which is a mixture of the East and the West – Russia will never become a real participant of the European order, as other countries (EU members) do. It is a partly linked with the question of the relations between the European and other directions in Russian foreign policy.

Not before the late 1990<sup>s</sup> did the awareness emerge among the Russian elites that the new division of Europe might prove more significant and enduring, as a consequence of integration processes within the EU [2, p. 163–164]. Regarding the EU enlargement as an objective process was replaced by tracking new problems, such as an access to the Kaliningrad region or rivalry in the post-Soviet area.

Thus, the rivalry between Russia and the EU follows the clash of two superpowers: one that has already failed and one that is probably emerging. The European integration so far, coupled with the EU enlargement with the former Eastern bloc states, caused a fundamental change in Russia’s geostrategic position. For the first time in a few centuries a powerful actor has emerged just next to Russia. It tends to block Russia’s expansion (not always intentionally) and, in a long-term perspective, it may even pose a threat of eliminating Russia from the European order. Russia has never faced a single Europe (even in Napoleon’s era it allied itself with Great Britain and Sweden); it has always remained a crucial component of the European balance of power. The EU, which has no traditional strategic culture, typical for a superpower with a uniform political center, unconsciously behaves like a predator state – creating an enduring sphere of influence, based on economy. At the same time it does not leave any space or a buffer zone for Russia. The EU strength is based on the legal and economic unification of new members, rather than on its armed forces or foreign policy. From this point of view, the Union becomes a postmodern empire [8, p. 22].

In the beginning, Russia’s strategy (when the issue of enlargement became apparent) was defined as the “minimization” of negative consequences. Originally (as early as the beginning of 1997), Moscow was considering another trilateral format, namely Russia’s direct involvement in the accession talks of the candidate countries and the European Union. When this turned out to be impossible, the Kremlin

changed its tactics and began to follow a two-track policy. On the one hand, it began to take relatively active steps to establish economic and financial bridgeheads in the countries of the expected first wave of enlargement. On the other hand, it has tried, in the different fora of Russia-EU dialogue, to ensure that special Russian interests are taken into account during the accession talks (There even exists a nonspecified list of Russian desires that was officially handed over to the European Union in 1999 [18]).

With the biggest EU enlargement in 2004 Moscow has identified both positive and negative consequences of European Union integration process vis-à-vis its own interests. Positive consequences included:

- The widening of the zone of political and economic stability in Europe;
- Increased attractiveness of the European part of Russia for investors;
- The contribution that Russia's integration will make to the all European economic space, especially to the united transport and communication systems;
- Increased potential for trade due to simplified and unified customs procedures, and accounting.

Possible negative consequences of EU enlargement perceived by Moscow are partially real, but to a great extent intentionally exaggerated to achieve extra benefits:

- Trade and investment, i.e., the continued reorientation of the new members toward EU markets, further decrease of Russian–new EU member trade, especially in terms of Russian energy deliveries; and redirection of foreign investment to the new members at the expense of Russia;
- Movement of people, i.e., crossing borders will be more complicated due to the visa regime to be introduced;
- Kaliningrad, i.e., communication, supply, and transportation with and through Kaliningrad will be more problematic;
- Political isolation, i.e., Russia will not only be pushed further to the edge of the continent, but the number of those opposing the European Union's closer cooperation with Russia will increase by the enlargement [17, p. 146].

It is very clear that both the perceived negative and positive consequences of EU enlargement have to do, first of all, with economic considerations because Russia-EU relations are characterized by a double asymmetry: while Russia's basic interest is in the economic domain, the European Union is mainly interested in political and soft security matters. Moreover, within the area of economics, Russia is clearly dependent on the European Union, while the reverse is not the case.

One of the main Russia's fears connected with EU integration is The European Union's involvement in the post-Soviet area. Russia considers the EU as a potential center that may attract post-USSR states, which directly weakens Moscow's power to integrate the post-Soviet area. Russia is not an attractive center in political, economic or civilizational sense. The Common Economic Space, launched in 2003, serves as a good example. Russia thought the CES to be a way of retaining its influence in key post-Soviet states (especially in Ukraine and Kazakhstan) and of strengthening its position in the international arena by the creation of a powerful economic bloc that would support Moscow.

The EU is Russia's serious rival as far as economic and civilizational potential is concerned, even though it officially denies that the CIS states could join the EU. These states are aware that it is impossible to function simultaneously within two economic blocs that promote supranational integration (the CES was designed to meet these characteristics). Fears that the CIS states would accede to the EU, although the Union's political plans do not currently provide for it, are the most crucial potential reason of a dispute with the EU. The possibility of Ukraine's accession to the EU causes fears that a new iron curtain between Russia and the West could emerge [8, p. 23].

Moreover, Russia considers the European Union's involvement in Ukraine or Moldova a potential intervention of the West in Russia's exclusive competencies. In 2003, the Russian peace plan for the settlement of the crisis in Transdnestria was rejected, which in some Russian politics' view was due to the EU intervention. Russians think that Western policy in Eastern Europe is either isolationist or it aims at restraining Russia [1]. However, in the EU's view, the borderland between the EU and Russia is a source of potential crises and political confrontation. Both Russia and the EU are interested in maintaining stability in their close neighborhood. Russia seems to have believed that it would maintain

its dominance in the CIS region and that the EU could accept it in exchange for the stability. For instance, however, at the OSCE meeting in Maastricht in December 2003 the Union demanded that Russia fulfill its commitments (to withdraw military bases from Georgia and Moldova until the end of 2003), which showed that the Union was not going to respect the Russian sphere of influence.

One of the main obstacles that inhibit the development of the Europe-Russia relations is Moscow's partial misunderstanding of the European integration. The EU is principally an association of sovereign states, based on the rule of both international and community law. However, the Russian vision of the world order assumes that the international law should provide for special rights and obligations for the most powerful states, giving them a privileged position. The Kremlin fails to understand that Luxemburg enjoys the same voice as Germany does (although their votes have different weights), and, moreover, other states will take it into account. Therefore, Russia has repeated the same failure, hoping that agreements with main EU actors can change the Union's institutional and legal framework in favor of the RF [8, p. 9].

Such a view on the EU is quite apparent in the way Russia treats Poland and other Central and Eastern European states. Russian elites assume that Poland serves only as an object of a game played by the strongest states and the Eurobureaucracy, on the assumption that Moscow's 'Big Brother' has been simply replaced by the one seated in Brussels.

The fact that the political cultures of Russia and the EU do not square with each other, coupled with the following mutual misunderstanding, can be a key problem in the long-term process of shaping positive relations. In this case, it is also worth recalling the opinion of an outstanding practitioner of Realpolitik, Henry Kissinger, that a clash of powers is 'manageable', but the clash of values will inevitably cause a conflict.

What Russian analysts blame as a cause of the present state of the European integration (unfavorable from the Russian interests' point of view) is Brussels' bureaucracy. They would like to see the Europe of de Gaulle, Churchill or Adenauer – an association of sovereign states, but what they actually see is the rising Eurobureaucracy and a new sort of political correctness [10]. The frequently repeated opinion is that bureaucracy plays a disproportionately large role in Europe. It has created a sort of 'political correctness', an egalitarian ideology, that opposes the use of power, supports pro-environmental initiatives and rejects extremism [9].

Another factor responsible for both developing EU integration and its increasing role in the international arena is, as Russians perceive it, the activity of the European Commission. It has gained many competencies of national governments and parliaments, while its aiming at making the European economy the most competitive in the world (Lisbon Strategy) resulted in that it has seized the bulk of the decisions regarding the common market [4, p. 10].

One more important case of Russia's EU integration perception is that Russia seems to misunderstand the change in the European order over the past quarter of century. The problem it has faced since the end of the Second World War is that it has been too weak to gain power over Europe, but also too strong to become an 'average' European superpower, like Great Britain or France.

Then and now Moscow made fun of the EU as a stooge and protectorate of the USA, an entity whose foreign policy and even economy are controlled from the other shore of the Atlantic. Then and now the Russian strategy was to unravel European integration, to confront it with its own integration projects and tear off Europe from the US command and cooperation. Therefore, Russia was closely monitoring the processes and constant crises in EU – with the idea of using any dissenting voices, factors and internal contradictions in the alliance present due to the natural differences and inequalities between its members. In this vein, Moscow had a stake in those European forces that argued for a constructive, respectful dialogue with Moscow [14].

The cooperation with the EU as a whole and support for the deepened European integration could accelerate the emergence of a partner for the Russian Federation. Russia's approach to the EU as an independent international partner is split between seeking an anti-American partner and fearing that the integrated Europe will become a dominating power on the European continent and deprive Russia of its influence in the western part of the CIS.

In theory, various patterns of Russia-EU relations could develop in the future. The list of the possible patterns of Russia-EU relations is long, ranging from being enemies of each other, through rivalry, neutral/low priority relations, partnership, distinguished partnership, permanent associate membership, to full-fledged membership. But the most possible scenario is that Russia will continue to conduct the policy of dividing European states, apparently fearing that today's Union may transform into a uniform political actor.

The Kremlin's concerted effort to establish networks of political influence in the EU is working. The aim remains the same: to cultivate a network of organizations and individuals that support Russian economic and geopolitical interests, denounce the EU and European integration, propagate a narrative of Western decline, and vote against EU policies on Russia (most notably sanctions)—thus legitimating the Kremlin's military interventionism in Ukraine, weakening transatlantic institutions, and undermining liberal democratic values [16].

This strategy is based on the fact that the unity of the European Union makes any negotiations more difficult for Russia. Tightening political ties would mean the end of Russia's capabilities of interfering with Europe.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, the analysis of the scientific literature on this issue has shown that one of the main obstacles that inhibit the development of the Europe-Russia relations is Moscow's partial misunderstanding of the European integration.

From the very beginning of the European integration process first the USSR, then after it collapsed – Russia, regarded those processes with suspicion. At the beginning of 90ies there was a brief period when Russia did not see the EU enlargement as a threat to its interests and even did not exclude a possibility of its potential membership in the EU.

The Russia's integration to the EU is literally impossible anyway, according to the historically constituted views and understandings shared by the Russian elite regarding the proper role and purpose of Russia in the international and European political order. The historically constituted national role conception provides a cognitive and normative background for the formulation of foreign policy and therefore policy towards the EU.

With the later enlargements of the EU, Russia began to recognize EU integration process as a potential intervention in its exclusive spheres of influence. A more integrated Union according to Russia's fear would make it an EU's junior partner.

Thus Russia chose the strategy to unravel European integration, to confront it with its own integration projects and tear off Europe from the US command and cooperation. Russia closely monitors the processes and constant crises in EU and tries to cultivate a network of organizations and individuals that support Russian interests in European countries. Those actions have one purpose – to disintegrate the EU.

Anyway, the future development of the Russia-EU relations will, to a large extent, depend on the direction of the evolution of the European integration. Whether Russian authorities want it or not they will have to deal with further EU enlargements.

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У статті висвітлено результати теоретичного аналізу ставлення Росії до європейської інтеграції. Аналіз розкрив історичні, когнітивні та дискурсивні джерела небажання Росії вступати до ЄС. Дослідник розкриває деякі теорії вчених пов'язані з російською національною концепцією та її впливом на відносини Росії та ЄС. Для глибини наукового аналізу акцентується увага на еволюції сприйняття Росії процесів європейської інтеграції.

**Ключові слова:** Росія, Європейський Союз, інтеграція, розширення ЄС, концепція національної ролі, зовнішня політика.