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Globalisation and Democracy: Russia's Case

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Summary

It is difficult to find any other notion than “globalisation” which would be used so often and which would have so many interpretations. For political scientists it means first of all increasing democratisation of the world. Russia came out of the USSR with the only one desire to become part of the civilised world and consequently of the main international institutions. Nowadays, ten years after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia still stays outside the main international institutions. The gap between Russia and enlarging Europe is growing. Why did it happen? What are the underlying reasons of this situation? The presentation is focused on these problems.

Key words: democracy, European Union, globalisation, Russia, Soviet Union, security



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Globalisation as an inclusive strategy

It is difficult to find any notion other than “globalisation” which would be used so often and which would have so many interpretations. For a long time globalisation was analysed mostly in terms of market economy as the source of contemporary history.

The post-Cold war history showed that this process has many other aspects. For political scientists it primarily means increasing democratisation of the world and for strategic community sustaining peace and fighting international terrorism by joint efforts of all the concerned countries regardless of their different cultures. In this respect regional democratisation is part of global democratisation. The most impressive example of regional democratisation is the European integration enhanced by the end of bipolarity.

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after the dissolution of the USSR, Russia is still outside the main international institutions. The gap between Russia and the enlarging Europe is growing.

European integration as an integral part of globalisation

In spite of powerful impulses encouraging the development of strategic partnership relations between Russia and the European Union their future relations are largely determined by the success Russia will achieve in its domestic system transformation, on the one hand, and by the final results of the in-depth transformation of the European Union, on the other. The uncertainty surrounding the process of future democratic and socioeconomic transformations in Russia is viewed as the main hindrance in the relations between Russia and the European Union. Since the 1990s Europe has had serious apprehensions about the prospects of a democratic reform in Russia. All those apprehensions have caused many other problems in the relations between Russia and the European Union: absence of strategic goals in the relations between Russia and the European Union is resulting in the growing gap between the unifying Europe and Russia. The absence of any long-term concept of the relations between Russia and the European Union and the strategic objectives determining their current policies is viewed as the main obstacle preventing Russia and the European Union from working out the principles of effective policy with regard to one another.

Apparently both Russia and the European Union do not have Russia's accession to the EU on their agendas because neither party is prepared to meet with such a contingency. This issue, however, is frequently debated theoretically, and it has its advocates and opponents both in Russia and in the EU countries, Russia's enormous size being one of the principal arguments against Russia's membership in the European Union: it will "always be too large for Europe."

The advocates of Russia's gradual integration into European structures contend, however, that based on its economic potential, its demographic trends and the evolution of its armed forces, Russia may soon be rated as an average European country. Therefore, they maintain, the main condition should be its conformity with the Copenhagen criteria rather than its size.

At this point Russia and the EU countries have not developed the same approach to the model of their partnership. The existing divergence of views, however, may be reduced to two primary options: "selective cooperation between Russia and the EU" (peaceful coexistence) on the basis of the existing legislation, first and foremost, in compliance with the provisions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), or strategic partnership with Russia on the basis of a new agreement, such as a special Agreement on Russia's Association with the EU.

The 1997 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) is the primary legal document determining the relations between Russia and the EU. In the meantime, the relations between Russia and the EU in the political sphere have long gone beyond the limits outlined by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. As regards the sphere of economic cooperation, in spite of a major progress made in that direction, neither Russia nor the EU have realized in full the potential of the PCA. Admittedly, some of the

provisions of the Agreement are outdated; others are not observed by either party. This classification applies to 64 articles of the said Agreement.

The absence of strategic goals in the relations between Russia and the EU also manifested itself in the *Strategies* adopted in 1999 by the EU and Russia with respect to one another following the Kosovo crisis, although their significance was largely symbolic.

The advocates of the so-called “selective cooperation” both in Russia and in the European Union contend that the parties ought to take a full advantage of the potentials contained in the 1997 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement by way of “forcibly” putting to use the currently inactive articles and provisions of the Agreement without proposing any new big-scale initiatives.

The other view shared by various people both in the EU and in Russia purports that in view of widening and deepening of the European integration and considering the new threats and challenges to European security the relations between Russia and the EU should be brought to a higher new level of cooperation which the 1997 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement cannot provide. Such new level of cooperation could be attained through an *Agreement on Establishing a Special Association between the Russian Federation and the European Union*. This goal fully meets long-term interests of both Europe and Russia. On the one hand, such an Agreement on Association *per se* does not imply Russia’s aspiration to join the EU as its member. On the other hand, such an agreement would provide a solid legal basis for the relations evolving between the EU and Russia. It would contribute to the convergence of Russian and EU political, economic and legal systems; enhance sustainable development of their economies; promote further development of democracy in Russia, and ensure closer cooperation of the parties in all directions including security measures. The “special association” implies that the EU agreement with Russia draws a line between this and other agreements on association regarding Russia’s importance and status, its role in the termination of the “cold war,” as well as its input in the antiterrorist coalition. Undoubtedly, an Agreement on Association *per se* won’t resolve all problems in the EU-Russia relations but together with some other measures and programs such an agreement would bridge the existing gap between the unifying Europe and Russia, which is likely to lead to the emergence of a new dividing line on the European continent.

The success of a future partnership between Russia and the European Union will depend on the impact which the processes of widening and deepening of the European integration, first and foremost, its institutional transformations in the enlarged European Union, will have on its viability and its efficiency as Europe’s primary international institution.

Both the widening and deepening of the European integration (especially in the spheres of defense and security) ought to include a Russian dimension which implies a comprehensive series of programs and measures aimed at bridging the gap between the unifying Europe and Russia.

Democracy versus stability

The uncertainty regarding the prospects of Russian democracy seems to have been induced by the following three factors. First, by the stereotypes juxtaposing the Russian and the European values as incompatible. But on many occasions – beginning with the August coup d'état in 1991 and ending with Russia's participation in the anti-terrorist coalition in 2001 – Russians proved that their values are rooted in European values. Second, by the Soviet syndrome which means that the West and some of the post-communist countries don't see any difference between Russia and the USSR. It is worthwhile to remind that the USSR would not have collapsed so quickly without the efforts of Russian democrats, and Russia's economic and political fabric differs from that of the USSR. Third, by the mistakes made by the Russian leaders in the past decade (the use of force for resolving Russia's internal political crisis in October 1993; the war in Chechnya; imposition of controlled democracy) which impelled Europe to question Russia's adherence to democratic principles. This third factor really matters. But the EU countries, as well as Western countries as a whole, however, were not impartial observers and they often showed neglectful and cynical attitude toward Russia's vested interests. On the one hand, they ignored the premise that Russian democracy could only succeed under the conditions of favorable external environment instilled by them; on the other, they showed distrust in the future democratic transformations in Russia giving preference to stability rather than democracy in Russian society. A US president once remarked that nations, which prefer stability to democracy, fail to get both nor do they deserve any stability and democracy. Well, this is true of both Russia and the West at this stage.

In October 1993 Yeltsin's regime spilled first blood in Russia's post-communist history, exceeding permissible boundaries in its struggle against the opposition and breeding all subsequent problems, e.g. the victory of conservatives and nationalists in the course of the December 1993 parliamentary elections, an obviously authoritarian presidential constitution, the first Chechen war and lots more, the notorious "family" included. In fact, the degeneration of Yeltsin's regime started precisely in October 1993. Russia, which should not shift responsibility for its own sins on someone else, nonetheless ought to admit that the West didn't just stand idly by. One can only guess how Russia would have developed, if Bill Clinton and Helmut Kohl hadn't supported Boris Yeltsin, and had they not turned a blind eye on Russian radical democrats' unconstitutional actions in the name of "market reforms" and democracy. The October 1993 events have confirmed an old wisdom to the effect that any particular goal doesn't justify the means for attaining it. The West, which had sided with those specific persons, who called themselves democrats, or who had the reputation of being democrats in the past, has thus fallen hostage to them and their mistakes. Unlike Russian public at large, the West showed understanding for the first Chechen war, evidently expecting a quick victory on the Kremlin's part. In fact, that victory was perceived by Yeltsin as something vitally important in the context of strengthening his domestic position. However, the Chechen war alone, which was virtually approved by the leading Western countries at first, subsequently came to be regarded by Europe and the United States as yet another evidence of Russian unpredictability and as one of the arguments favoring NATO's eastward expansion.

In other words, the West continued to back Yeltsin's weakening regime (that was still considered to be democratic or the best possible option on Russian territory), also erecting a new European border for safety's sake, so as to counter any unforeseen developments. Official NATO circles used to justify their bloc's eastward expansion in every possible way, stressing that this process was not spearheaded against Russia. However, all those incoherent and contradictory explanations on the part of NATO's leadership only served to increase suspicions concerning the genuine goals of such expansion that were voiced by the Russian political elite and the intelligence (strategic) community. As we look back in time, we can safely say that Russia's relations with NATO and the West had mostly evolved in line with the logic of self-fulfilling prophecies. Apart from that, the Kosovo crisis had virtually proven that the West didn't view Russia as a full-fledged partner.

Domestic and foreign policy challenges to democratisation in the post-Yeltsin Russia

Parallely with assessing the current trends and options in Russia's relations with the United States, NATO and the EU, one cannot ignore the way Russia itself will be evolving. In all countries foreign and domestic policies go hand in hand. In Russia this interdependence is especially acute. The very beginning of the 'anti-terrorist' cooperation immediately had a strong positive impact on Russia's domestic situation. It changed the balance of forces in Putin's entourage in favour of liberals. Moscow had to start political negotiations on Chechnya, and on 18 Nov. 2001 representatives of President Putin and Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov had a meeting at Moscow's international airport. The roots of these positive changes are understandable—being 'on board' means behaving according to the commonly recognised rules, while being kept at 'arm's-length' allows one to play according to one's own rules and interests. When it became clear that the anticipated breakthrough in Russian–Western relations was not in fact happening, some of these positive trends were reversed or frozen: no progress towards a political solution of the Chechen problem, new attacks on independent mass media (the TV-6 case), new spy scares, and a growing anti-Westernism among the Russian political elite. All these processes are evolving parallely with the Kremlin's endeavours to continue the anti-terrorist cooperation and to develop Russia's relations with the EU and NATO.

To a large extent this situation can be explained by the fact that Vladimir Putin has not created a solid political foundation for his foreign policy course. Moreover, he has launched most of these trends himself, having come up with a strategy guided by three incompatible goals: a 'strong state' based on 'controlled democracy'; liberal economic reforms; and good relations with the West. The restoration of 'vertical power' (the Soviet-like federal centre) by means of 'controlled democracy' (political squeeze on any opposition) for the sake of economic reforms is not a viable strategy in Russia. True, in Chile, South Korea and Taiwan economic reforms have been ushered in by authoritarian regimes with a strong element of state support and planning. But Russia is too big a country to stop the authoritarian trend at the right point and at the right moment. This approach, too, is incompatible with good relations with the West, since 'controlled de-

mocracy' cannot exist without an external enemy. From this point of view, 11 September has been 'a defining moment' not only for Russia's foreign policy but for Putin's previous controversial policies based on bureaucratic consensus. It is very telling that Putin's foreign policy since 11 September has been supported by Russian democrats, who are the most consistent opponents of 'the controlled democracy' concept, and has not been backed by the supporters of the strong state and controlled democracy. The need to correct Putin's strategy is obvious; the key question is: which of three elements will be changed?

Ironically, Putin's 'strong hand' strategy was accepted not only by Russians but by the West itself. Both Europe and the United States were tired of the roller-coaster of Russia's evolution under Yeltsin and viewed Putin as a leader capable of ensuring Russia's domestic and external stability (even if this was achieved by limiting democracy to some extent). Having preferred stability to democracy, the West unwillingly gave a green light to the trends which are now being perceived as obstacles to Russia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic space of cooperation after 11 September.

The primary responsibility for Russia's future rests with Russians, and it is for Russia to decide which was the aberration in its history—either the seventy years of the communist rule or the one decade of its independence (however controversial it was). The leading countries of the West can support democracy in Russia, not so much by financial aid or a deep involvement in Russia's domestic affairs, but more by creating a benign international environment for its democratic evolution. The post-11 September cooperation, if it could be transformed into a partnership, would offer this chance. But democratisation still remains the major precondition for Russia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic arena of cooperation. If there had been no regression in the process of Russia's democratic evolution in recent years, the division between Russia and the West would have been erased for ever, and Moscow would have had more chances to be included in the integrational processes developing in Europe.

Both Russia and the West are being faced with a paradox in their relations: on the one hand, Russia's democratisation is the necessary precondition for its integration into Europe's main institution, and on the other hand, democratisation of Russia cannot be achieved without Russia's integration into Europe. There is only one solution – to develop both processes hand in hand.