
The future of Russia and the EU.

By Sergei Karaganov
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For Russia, Europe is a centuries-long magnet, which has had a strong influence on its cultural identity to this day. For Europe, Russia as always been both a shield and a threat. Russia defended Europe from the Mongols, Turks and Nazis; it has been the most reliable among a host of almost wholly unreliable major suppliers of energy, which Europe generates on a negligible scale. But defending Europe, Russia sometimes launched an offensive and gained control over some of its parts. Moreover, following the usual European road, Russia has never been fully European, nor has it been capable of it.

The past few years have made relations between Europe and Russia even more confusing than before. The former has built a post-European civilization based on a renunciation of violence, individualism, and partly sovereignty; has built a society where all its members can coexist in comfort; and, importantly, has overcome the curse of strife and hostility. But having made these spectacular achievements, Europe has lost its strategic loadstar. Having absorbed 27 countries, Europe does not know what to do next. Nor does it have any strategy as regards Russia.

Having overcome its communist past, Russia rushed to Europe just to find that it was not very welcome. Even more importantly, it transpired that Europe had changed beyond recognition, and was very different from what we yearned for. As a result, Russia also lost its old vector.

This mutual loss has become particularly clear in the past few years. Having quickly established a close dialogue in the early 1990s, the sides discovered that they did not have much to talk about. Their rapprochement produced shallow documents about four spaces. The situation was made worse by Europe's extension, which not only consolidated the traditionally anti-Russian forces but created the impression that in its domestic, and to some extent, foreign policies Moscow was following a non-European and even an anti-European road.

In turn, we came to the conclusion that the indecisive Europe was a weakling.

In line with Russia's worst political tradition, coupled with our own humiliations of the past decade, we started talking to the Europeans with arrogance, if not disdain. In the past few months - after the fantastic polonium scandal and the European criticism of Russia's decision to export gas to Belarus at higher prices, we have come to think that Russia will be censured no matter what it does. Europe's moral and political influence has diminished.

In this situation, even mild criticism of truly hideous events in Russia cannot be perceived as a desire to help.

The dialogue has been reduced to tough bargaining on energy. Pressure is becoming tougher. Europe demands that Russia give up its monopoly on oil and gas pipelines, although Norway, a de facto EU member, still has such monopoly.

Although Europe insists that Russia should give foreign companies access to its resources, many countries all over the world do not do so. It is not clear whether this is good or not but Russia seems to have been chosen as a weak link. The Iranians and the Saudis will not even hear of it. It is possible to push Uzbeks, Turkmen, or Kazakhs, but the biggest part of their resources is transported through Russia.

Russia feels strong, and is not going to yield. It is not frightened by the threats to build oil and gas pipelines around it. Quite the contrary, they reinforce its resolve to build pipes to the East, thereby strengthening its grip on the market. The new Russia-EU Treaty, which should replace the 1994 partnership and cooperation agreement, is likely to become another bureaucratic sham.

We have come to what seems to be a deadlock. What can we do now? We should not be rude, but nor should we yield to pressure because concessions will only generate further demands. A strange promise by our officials at the Russia-EU summit in Lahti not to charge European airlines for transit over Siberia starting in 2007 has already led to demands for more benefits.

But the deadlock will be overcome in a couple of years when Russia gives up its patently ineffective political and economic model of the past two years, and when Europe gets its act together and adopts a clear-cut strategy for the future.

New members will melt in the pot, and will stop being a drag on Europe and playing up to its rivals.

A new generation of leaders will not care for the old socialist (albeit enlightened) model of European development. The newcomers with their renunciation of socialism could be helpful here.

Let's hope that European leaders will become younger and will move to the right. I'd like to hope for similar changes in Russia. We will then have a new round of rapprochement, which will not be based on the teacher-student model or tough rivalry. Russia cannot be pushed into playing a student's role.

Europe will define its future model. On March 25, a historic EU summit will celebrate 50 years since the Treaty of Rome created the European Economic Community. The best brains in Europe are working on a declaration designed to give a strategic vision of the future and take the EU out of the impasse.

For all my deep respect and sympathy for these people, I'm afraid they will not produce anything meaningful. Europe should proclaim a course towards a genuine political alliance and formation of a quasi-federative state. But the Europeans will not go for this. Another option is to move backwards and accept that political unification was a mistake, that the EU should not have pursued a common foreign and defense policy. But this will not be easy to do. There is one more option - to move towards a strategic super-alliance with Russia, its territory, armed forces, and resource potential. But the Europeans are not yet ready for this move at all.

So, we will have to wait instead of bargaining over trifles; we should not give concessions and should work for rapprochement at cultural level, taking small steps and working on minor projects.

We can achieve the goal if we do not fail as a civilization, or get bogged down in the quagmire of isolation. In several years the Europeans, who will inevitably become weaker compared with other centers in the world, may still come back to my third option.

In this case, Russia and Europe will be in for a new historical rapprochement, which will benefit all Europeans - from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Sergey Karaganov is dean of the Faculty of World Economics and Politics, Higher School of Economics.

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