
Dmitry Medvedev's Foreign Policy (III)

Vladimir Batyuk

<http://en.fondsk.ru/article.php?id=1309> - 17/4/2008

"If I wish to phone Europe, who do I call?"

H.Kissinger

There is no need to stress that relations with Europe will always be the most significant direction of Russia's foreign policies. That was so for the past 1, 150 years of Russian history from Rurik to Putin, and it will be so in future. However, the character of relations changed many times, and it will be inevitably changing under the new Russian president. As a matter of fact, the changes are underway already.

*** The most important of the changes is the beginning of restoration of Russia's status of a subject of relations with Europe. In the 1990s the new Russian elite viewed its principal objective of its European policies in ensuring integration of the Russian Federation into the European Union, even as a minor partner. The chimera of "entering Europe" urged Moscow to make unilateral concessions, signing obviously disadvantageous unequal agreements with Brussels (the most notorious examples include the 1997 Russia-EU Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation and Europe Energy Charter).

However, in the past several years both Russian society and top politicians nearly stopped being thrilled by illusions about the RF's integration into Europe, at present the loud calls "to join the EU" are voiced only by political jesters the likes of Bogdanov and Novodvorskaya. Moscow was made to realise that this country is still overboard where European integration processes are concerned, first and foremost owing to the fact that the EU itself is not prepared to have Russia in its numbers.

As is commonly known Brussels determines relations with Russia based on the EU concept "Wider Europe-Neighbourhood" also known as "Policies of European Neighbourhood" (PEN). In line with it Russia is just another country in the conglomerate of the neighbours of the United Europe in the south and the east, from Morocco to Belarus. The common PEN denominator for them is they would NEVER become EU members. Instead of full-fledged EU membership these "neighbours" get the offer to vie for their share of the EU inner market and to take part in the ongoing integration on the basis of four freedoms (freedom of movement of people, commodities, services and capitals) and based on the EU legal norms, *acquis communautaire*. But unlike dealing with its Mediterranean neighbours with whom the EU has agreements on free trade and "with many of them" on associations, nothing of the kind is in place or expected to be in place in regard of Russia in future. Brussels prefers to have closer ties with Europe's former colonies rather than with Russia, and based on its priority scale, European bureaucracy places Russia much lower than Tunisia and Algeria (1).

RF Deputy Foreign Minister V. Chizhov described the "Policies of European Neighbourhood" as a present-day version of "Pax Romana" that fixes the relations between the metropolis (Western Europe) and its provinces (Eastern European countries), with Brussels not being prepared to make any other option to Moscow (2).

The much-trumpeted agreements on "shared space" of Russia and the EU in the areas of economy, security and jurisdiction, external security, education and culture changed nothing. These absolutely empty documents apparently envisaged nothing but "invigoration of the dialogue" between Brussels and

Moscow in these areas. Thus the agreements on "shared spaces" do not mean that Brussels gives up its line of relations with Moscow in the PEN format.

On the one hand, the total exclusion of Russia from European integration processes creates new difficulties in Russia's relations with its neighbours in the post-Soviet space, primarily Ukraine, whose leaders have after 2004 firmly embarked on the path of "European integration" "at any cost."

On the other hand, it only does one good to give up empty illusions. In the end the Russian political leaders were forced to admit that where Russia is concerned the European Union would remain some remote external entity, so "to become part of the EU" is impossible as it would be to become "part of either China or India." Having made this "discovery" Moscow had to begin building its relations with Europe leaning on such fundamental principles as sovereign equality, equality of rights and mutuality. This new European policy has already begun to bear fruit for Russia.

By suspending observation of CFE Agreement and refusing to ratify Energy Charter, the tough trading with Brussels on various problems of Russia-Europe relations from environment protection to finances, all the steps Moscow made in relation to Europe were totally out of the question just a few years ago.

Similar to the dialogue with Washington Moscow can lean on much stronger political and economic positions in its dealings with Brussels: unlike the 1990s situation Russia is no longer threatened with a collapse, and it does not need to seek western financial assistance. Moscow is no longer on the international dole waiting for donations from Europe, vice versa, Europe is now concerned over the growth of Russia's financial potential, wary of acquisitions of European companies by Russian transnationals, for example Gazprom and Severstal, as well as the Russian Fund of Future Generations (whose capital is already in excess of \$30 billion).

Meanwhile, the stance of Brussels in its dialogue with Moscow, so strong some ten years ago, appears much weaker now. Having flatly denied Russia's entry into the EU, it thus lost the only strong argument in its dialogue with its eastern neighbour, as "United Europe" now has no leverage to make an impact on the external world except the promise of eventual giving others its membership.

What is even more significant, Brussels demonstrates its chronic inability to work out a solid political course with reference to Russia. The 2007 Agreement on Reforming the European Union that became an adulteration of the 2004 European Constitution, that does not envisage the presence of the single supranational EU policies. In line with the Agreement, the unified EU external policies and unified security policies is not to touch upon the legal foundations, responsibility and authority of EU member-states in their relations with third countries and international organisations, including the UN Security Council. Any decision related to the above Agreement requires a consensus of all the EU member-states.

Under the circumstances the EU, now having 27 members, faces huge problems while working out its unified policies (not only with regard to relations with Russia). The report published by the RF Foreign Ministry "Foreign Policies and Diplomatic Activities of the Russian Federation in 2007", negotiations on a new basic agreement between Russia and the EU that is to replace the Agreement on partnership and Cooperation, whose first term expired on December 1, 2007.

The EU failed to agree on the negotiations mandate. It became evident that the principal problem that stalls the development of our relations is the use by individual EU member-states of the "European solidarity" principle as the leverage to bring pressure to bear upon Russia where bilateral relations are

concerned. It being unprepared to conduct a constructive dialogue was also evident during discussions of issues of interaction in the field of external policies. The partners were unable to conduct a subject-matter discussion before the inter-EU consensus could be reached. But after that it became even harder to come to agreements with the EU given the lack of desire of the EU to make any concessions after everything had been agreed upon inside the EU.
(3)

*** On the one hand, this way Russia found itself outside the process of Euro-integration, but on the other, the integrated Europe is simply incapable of pursuing consorted Russian policies.

Hence the conclusion: Russia should reject claims of European uniqueness by the official Brussels, rather opting for the foreign policies guideline of creation of BIG EUROPE with equal membership of the countries that for one reason or another are incapable or unwilling to get the European Union's membership.

Politically, Russia is no part of Europe, and in no foreseeable future it will be that. Under the circumstances the Russian Federation has no other choice but to build its relations with Europe on the basis of realism. Whether anyone likes or dislikes it, this policy efficiently presupposes the undermining of the consolidated policies of the "united Europe" pursues with regard to Russia.

Correspondingly, the issue of building relations with INDIVIDUAL European states (or groups of states, the like of the German-French-Russian "Euro Three") becomes central in Russia's non-bloc European policies. For that matter, Moscow has already been following this line in its energy dialogue with the European countries, which brings it weighty fruit, including the realm of our relations with Eastern European countries.

This course in the European direction will apparently be logically developed after 2008, too, as Russia is objectively interested in a common European market for Russian companies to enter, but the political unity of Europe is not in our interests. Napoleon Bonaparte succeeded in ensuring the military and political unity of the European continent in 1809, and Adolf Hitler in 1940, and both times this "united Europe" finally attacked Russia. Nowadays, the political unity of Europe is embodied by the persevering eastward extension of the North Atlantic alliance. That is why the weakening of unity of the EU and NATO will become the main line direction of Russia's European policies. RF officials will continue to participate in NATO and EU collective events, but the centre of weight of Russia's policies in the European direction will constantly shift to relationships on a bilateral basis.

(To be continued)

(1) Commission of the European Communities. Brussels, 11.3.2003. COM (2003) 104 final. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Wider Europe " Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours. P. 4 -5.

(2) The speech by RF Deputy Foreign Minister V.Chizhov at the conference "Extending Europe: A New Agenda" on the topic "Problems and Promises of Wider Europe", Bratislava, March 19, 2004. www.mid.ru

(3) Foreign Policies and Diplomatic Activities of the Russian Federation in 2007. March, 2008. www.mid.ru
