

Heinrich Schwabecher: The Future of European-Russian Relations after 2007

The legal basis of the relations between Europe and Russia consists of two pillars – the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) of 1994 and the 'Four Common Spaces' of 2005. However, the parties do not regard these two documents as satisfactory; the younger document may even be considered a direct result of the deterioration in European-Russian relations at the end of 2004. This being so, several questions arise: What hides behind the two documents? What will the future mutual relations look like?

After the Kosovo crisis of 1999, it seemed that Europe had lost Russia, for under Russia's new president, Vladimir Putin, European-Russian relations changed quickly. The strong man in the Kremlin modernised the country's domestic policy, adopting at the same time a new course in foreign policy. It is true that in 2001, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, Putin assured the USA of Russia's solidarity and supported Washington in Afghanistan and in moving American troops to Central Asia, but as early as 2003, Russia's attitude towards the West changed, particularly towards Europe. The crisis became clearly visible in the great difference between Russia's and Europe's assessments of the revolutionary events that took place in Georgia late in 2003 and in Ukraine late in 2004. The 'four spaces' concept of May 2005 remained inconsequential, and the Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute at the end of 2005 prompted especially the Europeans to recognise the consequences of their dependence on Russian energy.

Now, what are the main points of conflict in this difficult relationship between Europe and Russia? On the one hand, there is the energy issue, with the Europeans criticising Russia because its energy sector is increasingly controlled by the state. On the other, Europe does not at all approve of the Kremlin's foreign policy in post-Soviet territories such as Georgia and Ukraine. And, finally, mutual relations are strained severely by certain domestic developments in Russia, such as the growing centralisation of power, stagnation within the judiciary system, and the lack of pluralism at all political levels.

Basically, the relationship between Russians and Europeans is paradoxical at the moment: On the one hand, the political and economic discrepancies between the two sides are greater today than they ever were in the last six years; on the other, the two have never been more dependent on each other than they are today. As an alternative to the difficult relations with the whole of Europe, Russia is increasingly endeavouring to expand political and economic relations with individual European countries. It is questionable whether there is any will left to cooperate. Given the controversial domestic and foreign policy of Russia's leadership, the number of those who advocate limiting cooperation with Russia is growing in the West. And in response to this, Russia on its part endeavours to follow its 'own democratic way'.

The first pillar of European-Russian relations, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which was signed in 1994 and entered into force in 1997, regulates cooperation between the two partners in the fields of politics, economy, justice, and culture. Based on respect for democracy and human rights, it describes objectives in the fields mentioned above. In this, the political dialogue that aims to strengthen the bond between Russia and the EU plays an important role. The Agreement provides for meetings between the president of the EU Council, the president of the EU Commission, and the Russian President to be held twice a year. Furthermore, a Cooperation Council is to be established whose work is supported by a cooperation committee consisting of members of the three parties mentioned above. Finally, an interparliamentary cooperation committee is to be created, composed of members of parliament of both parties.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement replaced the Agreement on Trade and Commercial

and Economic Cooperation that was concluded between the EU and the Soviet Union in 1989. However, it has by now come under fire itself as, according to the Russians, it no longer reflects reality. In fact, the Agreement, which originally was intended to last one decade and is going to expire formally by the end of 2007, dates from a time when European-Russian relations underwent their 'romantic' phase.

The second pillar of European-Russian relations, the 'Four Common Spaces' signed in 2005, says the following: The 'economy space' regulates cooperation between the two sides in the fields of commercial and economic cooperation, trade and tariff regulations, telecommunication and transport as well as energy, astronautics, and the environment. Dubbed 'freedom, security, and justice', the second space addresses visa, border, migration, and asylum issues, the fight against terrorism, document security, the suppression of organised crime, money laundering, drug and human trafficking, campaigns against corruption, and the fight against illegal trading in cars and cultural goods. The objective of the third space, 'external security', is to ensure cooperation in the fields of security and crisis management; the fourth space, 'education and culture', aims to promote the use of knowledge and their intellectual heritage to enhance economic growth and competitiveness in both the EU and in Russia.

Experts of both parties received the document, which is not binding in international law, with some reservations, since it does not contain concrete mechanisms to achieve its goals in the first place. However, it does reflect a wish to overcome the crisis in European-Russian relations and a will to strengthen the partnership.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1994 is going to expire in 2007, and the 'Four Common Spaces' will certainly not be able to replace it. So, what will the future relations between Europe and Russia look like? At the European-Russian summit meeting in Sochi, participants thought about how to respond to the expiry of the 1994 version of the Agreement, suggesting three options: The document could be extended by one year at a time; it could be altered and/or complemented and adjusted to new challenges; or, finally, it could be replaced by a completely new agreement after its expiry.

While the Russians favour the second and/or third version, the Europeans have their own interests. To Russia, establishing a visa-less regime between the EU and Russia, regulating the transit traffic to Kaliningrad, solving the problem of national minorities in the Baltic states, and politics in the post-Soviet territory are of great importance. What is especially important for both sides, on the other hand, is to solve the problem of the energy supply, where the disputes caused by Russia's refusal to ratify the energy charter and fall in with the Europeans' wishes predominate. However, even within Europe, priorities differ greatly. Thus, the EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe traditionally view their eastern neighbour with a critical eye and try to reduce their dependence on Russian energy, while Western European states, such as Germany, France, and Italy, whose relations with Russia are less problematic, are anxious to solve the energy problem bilaterally.

In fact, Moscow attempts to avoid ratifying the Charter by adopting a bilateral course. Within the EU, it is especially the northern states led by Finland, the current president of the Council, that try to mediate. From 2007 onwards, the rapprochement that everyone is anxious to achieve is to be continued under the German Council presidency.

Irrespective of all the differences, Europe continues to be an important economic and political partner for Russia. Among the Union's member countries, Germany especially has accorded priority to eastern and Russian policy. This is exactly why the Federal Government is called

upon to take an active part in the process of shaping European-Russian relations. And it should know that the power that today puts its back into shaping these relations will be Russia's leading dialogue partner in the future.