

The New European Union and the New Russia

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The European Union 2010 - A New Era

The Lisbon Treaty of the European Union has entered into force. It took a long time to bring it about. It took the Union ten years to achieve this result. It tells us of the uncertainties which continue to be associated with the notion of the Union to be an actor of its own on the world stage - on behalf of all member states. Traditionally individual countries try to pursue their interest separately or tend to associate themselves – notably in crises - with a leading country – mostly the USA – for pragmatic or historical reasons even if public support is missing.

Now, the European Union has the instruments at their disposal to act coherently on the international stage also on issues of foreign, security and defence matters. National unilateralism has lost its legitimacy – a defunct European Union! Nothing however will change from one day to the other. It will take its time to develop a coherent European Foreign and Security Policy. May be the rich experience of achieving common grounds between France and Germany - time and again - can serve as a point of reference and encouragement. The perspective of what Europe is going to be has changed and this in itself will have an impact on the decision making process in Europe and elsewhere – already today. The High Representative – the terminus for the “Foreign Minister” of the Union – will serve as the “international spokesman” of the European Council and its President, who will be elected now for two and half years – instead of rotating from one country to the other every six months. The High Representative/Foreign Minister will also be the Deputy President of the European Commission and be in charge of all foreign policy matters of the Commission. There will be a European Foreign Service at his disposal. The High Representative with his combined spectrum of responsibilities will represent the largest Economic block of the globe on the international stage.

It is not surprising that there are more countries in Europe aspiring to become a member of this Union that is based on democratic values and the respect for the human rights of the individual, of the citizen, a Union that has grown over a period of more than half a century. It is not surprising that the newly formed German Government – in its coalition agreement - sets the highest priority in its foreign policy agenda on the strengthening of the European Union.

Twenty years ago, the wall in Berlin was torn down by the peaceful revolution of the dissident movement in support of much needed democratic reforms in the GDR, which was at its origin a peace movement in East Germany. It seemed to be a German event and turned out to be a European, a global event, as we now recognize. It transformed the Cold War Confrontation into a world of competition and cooperation among civilisations with **a second rank position** for military geo-political considerations. The formula of the Rome Treaty of 1957 turned into a, into the mission for Europe – to establish for all European countries the framework needed to strengthen their democratic structures, their national economies and the respect for individual human rights by joining this community that had proven its credibility over a period of almost fifty years.

Prejudice, narrow-minded National self-interest constitutes each one in itself an obstacle on the road to a genuine European Union, but these are no longer goals that will bear rich benefits. No country is immune against such trends in domestic policies. I presume, however that -

once the new constitutional framework gets into gear - it will turn into a pacesetter for European policies at home and on the world stage.

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The New European Union will not only care to maintain and further develop stable and dynamic relations with its transatlantic partner – the USA - the indispensable strategic partner during the Cold War and now as well under different framework conditions. The New European Union seeks – if possible – also a stable and reliable partnership with its great European neighbour to the East– with Russia, the Russian Federation – an economic partner who ranks third among Europe’s foreign trade partners behind the USA and China. European exports to Russia are dominated by machine tools and other manufactured industrial goods, while gas and oil constitute the bulk of Russian exports to Europe. The development of a Russian internationally competitive industrial sector remains a goal - to be attained perhaps in the long run but not within the near future.

Except for international consultations on international crises such as the Iran case on a regular or on an ad hoc basis, the genuine negotiations between the European Commission and the Russian Government on the preparation and conclusion of a new Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation that would replace the agreement in force since 1997 are practically stalled, among others because of fundamental disagreements on the principles that should govern the energy relations between Russia and the European Union.

The democratic transformation process in Russia – as envisaged by the Charta of Paris from November 1990 signed by the Heads of State and Government of all countries partaking in the Conference for Cooperation and Security in Europe including the USA and Canada - did not materialize – until now. We are faced with an organized top-down, not bottom-up democracy, a judiciary system dependent on the executive power and individual human rights being strangled by Secret Services.

The implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, the economic decline of the successor states and the publicly pushed demand for “the strong man” in each of the successor states marginalized democratic reformers and brought forward nationalistic forces that adopted autocratic norms and forms of government as inherited from the near and from the distant past.

After two terms as President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin (2000-2008) proposed Dmitrij Medvedev - his political associate with strong links into the economic sector – to be elected into the office of President in 2008. He himself – Vladimir Putin – moved into the State Duma and was elected Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. God knows what succession arrangements will be found on the occasion of the next presidential elections in 2012.

Medvedev moved into two different directions – contradictory ones:

(1) Russia and its European Neighbourhood

More openly than his predecessors he claims the right for Russia to intervene by force – if needed - in her neighbours’ affairs in case strategic interests and requirements of Russia so demand. Such claims on geographic zones of dominating Russian strategic interests – to the detriment of the countries – are inconsistent with the international agreements on security and

cooperation in Europe (Charter of Paris November 1990, CFE Treaty November 1990, Council of Europe, OSCE) – not to speak of the Charter of the United Nations. Also, Russian President Medvedev claims the right for Russia to interfere in other countries' sovereignty in order to protect Russian citizens - a very ambiguous definition for the citizens of other countries – and loaded with historical tragedies.

In addition, the latest version of the Russian military doctrine does not rule out first use of nuclear weapons in critical situations. Does this mean a lack of confidence in the fighting capabilities of Russian conventional forces and in the country's capability to modernize efficiently Russian conventional forces within a reasonable span of time? Plans for such modernization schemes have been announced time and again.

The new foreign policy doctrine of the New Russia disquiets Russia's neighbours – for good reasons. Such arguments were used, when – following the German invasion on September 1, 1939 - the Red Army moved into Poland on September 17, 1939. It disquiets as well all other nations in Europe. Based on the rules adopted by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe the use or threat of force is eliminated from European soil as a legal means for the settlement of conflicts. No country in Europe is in a position to legitimize the establishment of national zones of predominant strategic interests to the detriment of other nations. Georgia is a case in point. The European Union or its members cannot and will not offer a "helping hand" for such policies or strategies or ignore such threats. Recent overtones on the part of President Medvedev for a new over-arching security umbrella – replacing among others NATO – remained without positive responses – for good reasons.

Based on the principles laid down in the Rome Treaty of the then European Community in 1957, other states in Europe can join the Community provided they have transformed their countries in accordance with the democratic European values, including market economies, independent courts and the respect for individual human rights. Also, the European Union must be in a position to be able to absorb the new member state in question. At the Summit of Prague on May 7, 2009, of Heads of State and Government of the European Union and of the neighbouring states to the East, namely Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus as well as the three South Caucasian States – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia agreed to initiate – under the heading of a new **"Eastern Partnership"** bilateral and multilateral programmes in order to approximate these six states politically with the European Union and to integrate the economies of these states into the European Union. In view of the insufficient democratic transformation achieved until now in several of these countries, also a European Civil Society Forum was established in order to strengthen civil society endeavours and activities in support of the democratic transformation process needed in such countries as Belarus and Azerbaijan.

No question, this programme constitutes the answer of the European Union to the neo-imperial claims advanced by the New Russia in her relationship to the neighbouring countries emanating from the Soviet Union.

(2) The Need for Substantive Reforms within Russia - Civil Society in Russia

Medvedev offers another opening into the future as well. Time and again he speaks of the necessity to modernize the Russian industrial sector in order to compete on the world market. He also brandishes corruption as a deadly disease of contemporary Russia. He can be assured that the Soviet system of the past was by no means less infected by corruption than the present Russian system of government. That, of course, is no excuse for the disease of corruption in

our times. Medvedev speaks also – with no less concern – of the need for an independent judiciary. He has distanced himself from efforts to defend the crimes committed by Stalin during his terror regime in the Soviet Union. In front of the Brandenburg Gate on November 9, 2009 – celebrating together with more than twenty Heads of State and Government the fall of the wall and the peaceful revolution in the GDR pushed ahead by the dissidents in the communist state – also Medvedev praised the principles of freedom, of the liberties of the citizen in democratic societies..

The state apparatus at his disposal is hardly capable to organize the changes needed in order to cope with the deficiencies identified by the President himself. In order to be set into motion the President would need a political party of reformers, and he would need a mandate from the people by way of free and fair elections exposed to international and domestic monitoring.

In the absence of such an option at this juncture, we have to look to the development of the Russian civil society: Apart from the civil society organisations encouraged to be set up by government institutions there are associations that are dedicated to the common European values of pluralistic democracies, the separation of power at the top among the executive branch, the legislative bodies and the judiciary as well with respect to the individual human rights that need to be protected by the judiciary against violations by state institutions – notably in the field of the media, of non-governmental organisations and of political parties. The association “Memorial”- its memorable work was honoured with the Andrej Sakharov-Award of the European Parliament in 2009 - maintains a powerful structure to expose the state crimes of the past, and to face the challenge of establishing historical truth on the crimes committed during Stalin’s dictatorship. They are as well deeply involved in the dialogue with Europe outside Russia in order to strengthen the ties between civil societies in Europe. The situation of Russia and its Civil Society is being reviewed annually in Berlin – organized by several German and Russian non-governmental organisations. This fall, the social dimensions of the current international financial and economic crisis will be discussed – from the Russian and the German perspective.

Given the immobility if not stagnation of the current Russian system of government, it falls upon civil society in Russia to generate ideas and initiatives for Russia’s future and to strengthen the reformists in Russia.

The emergence of a European Union capable of acting as one international power on the global stage on matters of security, international crisis management, but also on the financial and economic front, will help Russia to modernize well in the longer run.

A great deal has been said about the relationship between Germans and Russians. Some writers in the international media speculate about German-Russian agreements to the detriment of the European neighbours of Germany and Russia. North-Stream gas pipeline is quoted as the most striking example in this respect. Indeed the project should have been an inclusive project from the very beginning. There was a time that the political leadership in Germany (Gerhard Schröder) lost its confidence in the future of the Union – in the aftermath of the negative results of the referendum in the Netherlands and in France.

There was a time of illusions about the path and speed of reforms in Russia.

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