
THE KALININGRAD DREAM: FROM IMITATION TO IMPLEMENTATION. INTERNATIONAL ASPECT

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“Dreams that are not subject to doubt are easiest to fulfill”

Alexandre Dumas Sr.(1802 – 1870),
French author and dramatist

Due to its peculiar geopolitical destiny, our Russian region is located at the heart of economic and diplomatic games, played by the EU and Russia as they slowly come out of the socio-economic crisis.

The mission of our unique region is apparent: to promote Russia's presence in the accumulating power unified Europe. However, neither Moscow, nor Brussels put any real effort to untie the Baltic geopolitical knot. The higher the degree of mutual concern, the more visible is the deterioration of the situation for the million of Russian citizens at Russia's western borders. For example, Kaliningrad residents are losing their right to receive free Lithuanian and Polish visas - now to get them one needs to have a humiliating invitation; they are the only ones of the entire population of Russia who are required to have transit Lithuanian visas to go to Ukraine and Belarus, and so on. Given the sanctimonious reproaches by the capital's officials, these discomforts hang out over the socio-economic life of the region like a sledgehammer. The recent summit “Russia-EU” in Rostov-on-Don does not contribute to the solution to the Kaliningrad dilemma.

We ought to use the freedom to cogitate, compare and think that has been bestowed upon us. Otherwise our life will be just as vain as the TV box which to many serves a successful substitute for the real world, making their heart miss a beat while rejoicing over virtual victories.

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General comments

The post-crisis period creates the demand for both the implementation of the “no change” scenario, which has to do with the continuation of exploitation of the hydrocarbon udder by the Conservative Putinists, and reforms. The experienced shock may become a stimulus for the refinement of new models and approaches to the development of the Oblast. Meanwhile there is no intelligible reaction observable among Russia’s leadership to the model of the development of the region surrounded by the EU.

The most pernicious scenario is the intensification of domestic repression under the conditions of a confrontational foreign policy. This is the route of deadlock self-isolation, internal stagnation and outward enmity.

The best scenario for Russia’s exclave is the implementation of the Kaliningrad dream, which presupposes reorganization in three dimensions: restoration of federalism, including electivity of governors, democracy, and modernization. The Kaliningrad dream is a devout wish of the progressive part of the regional elite to ensure high standard of living, based on the freedom of the individual and culture in the western region of Russia.

Three approaches

For two decades the unusual location of the oblast has been the subject of internal political struggle. Three fairly clear approaches to the solution to the Kaliningrad dilemma may be distinguished.

The first approach is associated with the aspiration to maximum autonomusness of the region. It rests upon the idea of acquiring the status of a republic, subjectivity of international law and associated membership in the European Union. For this purpose in 2005-2006 an attempt was made to establish the socio-political movement “Republic”, which presently is in a frozen state.

The second approach is overtly diametrically opposite to the first approach. It presupposes setting a course on standardization, simplification, unification of the Oblast, leveling to a single norm, oneness, single form, and the same approach to the Oblast as to other subjects of the Federation. The proponents of this approach are convinced that the best measure against separatism is treating the Oblast as

well as other parts of Russia according to the principle “one size fits all”. They believe that the most reliable way to resolve a problem is not to discuss it.

The third approach seems to be the most promising. It rests upon the idea of emphasizing the unique state of the Oblast by passing federal laws on state guarantees for Kaliningrad residents, reducing administrative barriers and making international agreements between the Russian Federation (hereinafter – RF) and the EU.

Imitation

The Kaliningrad dilemma is still being solved in pretence. There is no breakthrough. Despite the victorious reports, the international situation of the region is in decline. Following the bureaucratic tradition, the issue is blabbed away. Adherents of the verticalization do not deem this issue topical. The real life is supplanted by dummies and unfeasible promises: an empty vessel makes the greatest sound.

The demagogic statements sound from both sides. For example, quite recently Franko Frattini, Italian minister of Foreign Affairs, has declared the possibility for Russian citizens to enjoy visa-free travel to Europe already this year. His compatriot Romano Prodi, previously the Chairman of the European Commission, dates the establishment of the visa-free regime between the EU and RF to as early as 2008. Vladimir Chizhov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the EU, keeps pace: “As for Russia, we are ready to cancel the visa regime even tomorrow, without any pre-conditions. In this regard the ball is fully in the EU field”. (“Безвизовый режим с ЕС не должен стать недостижимым светлым будущим” [Visa-free regime with the EU must not become an unattainable bright future] –“НГ” [NG], December 22, 2009). All this reminds of a Brezhnev-time joke when, to imitate the movement forward, a train carriage is zealously shaken.

The document of the European Commission under the pretentious title “Toward a partnership for modernization between the European Union and Russia”, which is to be issued in February 2010, is but a compilation of vague generalities and another imitation. Bureaucrats in Brussels fill the document with vain rhetoric on “balanced development”, “investment building” and other vain wishes. The effect is similar to that in Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin’s (1826 – 1889) fable: “The new

bear-voivode sought to silence all enemies, but ate a siskin. At that he chilled out”. Since the end of last year, the EU has cancelled visas for three republics of the former Yugoslavia: citizens of Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia can now travel freely to the EU countries. In the nearest months this opportunity will extend to Albania, Bosnia and Kosovo.

For the RF the Schengen Visa enquiry has to do with an extreme degree of bureaucratization – an interview and filling in an application form which consists of 48 questions. For example, participants of a 5-day package holiday are to provide information regarding their father and mother, previous visits to Schengen states and means of subsistence.

One should not get hung up on the grievances of the West. Positive actions should be advanced. Pedalling on the issue of permanent humiliation from the EU and inflating the suspiciousness phenomenon are counterproductive.

In reality the visa-free regime between the RF and the EU is not possible until 2015. Moscow’s position on the issue becomes transparent in a comment by Maxim Travnikov, Deputy Minister for Regional Development of the Russian Federation: “You will agree that it will be unfair if residents of the Kaliningrad Oblast will enjoy visa-free travel to Lithuania and Poland, while other citizens of the Russian Federation staying in the Kaliningrad Oblast will not” (“Московская зависть? [Moscow’s envy?] – «Дворник» [The Street Sweeper], Nr 38, 2009).

Challenge for modernization

Modernization is not a tribute to fashion, but rather a global competition among countries. As Russian political scientist Alexander Rubtsov notes, the “coffee break on oil” is becoming dangerously protracted. Meanwhile people are also raw material and a consumable item of the performance. The oil spirit is giddy. The country is becoming a semi-product, a fodder and is thus acquiring a state that will last a long time.

Meanwhile modernization is advancement to becoming up-to-date. This process is impossible without leaders and elites. What is at issue is not the question how to catch up with Lithuania and Poland in terms of quality of life; rather, it is how to change self, democratize politics, institutions, to enhance morale, values, and to create an effective civil society.

The objective has to be seen not in the traditional “catch up and outdo”, but in the creation of comfort life based on democratic institutions and innovative economy. The modernization process is non-intermittent and constant. Without democratization there can be no socio-political life.

The experience of South Korea, Singapore or China is not suitable for Russia. Tightening the screws, authoritarian leadership techniques, deep “freeze”, incredible growth rates under semi-slavery – this is a closed chapter dating back to the 30-50s of the 20th century.

Given the extremely high corruption and administrative barriers, our output will prove non-competitive, even if the oil barrel costs \$500 US.

If one is eager to assume a leadership position, the transition to the development policy is an overriding imperative. Such policy needs subjects of action taking interest in real changes, not in blabbing away modernization, demagoguery, and in new verbose formulations of old policies.

A constant dialogue between representatives of various interest groups may become an alternative to the habitual politicking.

Modernization must not become a slogan justifying a yet another distribution of budget funds among the Putinists.

Not only Skolkovo is an indicator of Russia’s modernization, but the Kaliningrad Oblast as well. Dropping measures on Moscow’s side toward our region will be indicative of the profanation of modernization. A breakthrough in Kaliningrad’s direction will demonstrate seriousness of intentions to modernize Russia.

Seven steps for advancement

Neither the RF, nor the EU can instantaneously, momentarily switch to a mutual visa-free regime. Our region can be the first to test this civilized practice. As Otto von Bismarck (1815 – 1898) noted, “Any politics is better than the politics of doubt”.

According to an ancient Roman saying, “Dropping water wears away the stone not due its strength, but due to the frequency of falling”. Regional authorities must influence rather than react, encouraging federal leaders and Euro-officials to take useful action in the interests of Kaliningrad residents.

Step One is the most important and difficult. The question on the presence in the currently developed framework agreement between the Russian Federation and the EU, which fundamentally defines the directions of the long-term strategic partnership, should be raised with all severity, possibly, as an appendix to the main text.

Three types of problems are relevant: economy, freedom and security, and education and science. Of great importance are issues related to consistent rules and norms ensuring cooperation, equality of competitive conditions, and free movement of goods, services and capitals. First investment and trade relations are to be identified. Then the necessary legal framework is to be created and extended. Integration is a process, not an aim. At the time of opening markets any economy finds additional resources for development. The issue of correlation between the European and domestic systems of standardization and technical regulation is crucial. One of the reasons for low competitiveness of our output at European markets is the discrepancy from the commonly accepted quality norms and technical standards.

In addition, a regulation has to be established on the provision of free Schengen multiple entry visas to RF citizens residing in the Kaliningrad Oblast.

Regulations are needed which would contribute to the formation of a common educational space, possibly on the basis of the Bologna process, which presupposes active exchange of lecturers, doctoral students, students, rapprochement of educational systems as well as mutual conversion of diplomas of higher education.

Step Two presupposes advocating the idea of entry liberalization up to a visa-free entry of the EU citizens to the Oblast. The Kaliningrad citizens ought not to be reminiscent of beggars exploiting geopolitical difficulties. Steps forwards need be taken, thus demonstrating openness and good will. Such disproportionate, asymmetrical (dissymmetrical) decision will stimulate the EU to provide concessions to Kaliningrad. The draft federal law has already been developed by regional opposition and presupposes introduction of changes and amendments made to the law on the entry/exit procedures to and from the RF. Approval of this initiative by the State Duma of the RF will lead to the investment flow and opening of new working places in the region.

Of course, every tub must stand on its own bottom. Moreover, the Oblast is not a subject of international law. However, application of successful practices will

enhance Russia's positions in the course of negotiations. Therefore, it is beneficial to study the experience of Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Iceland, which are not part of the EU, yet, along their basic criteria, meet membership requirements of the EU.

Step Three has to do with tactics. Firstly, signing of bilateral Russia-Lithuania and Russia-Poland agreements which will decrease the acuteness of the Kaliningrad visa problem has to be lobbied. The practice of provision of preferential national visas to the Oblast's residents will be resumed. Secondly, one has to seek abolition of the corrupted practice of invitations while insisting on multiple entry visas, which are valid for at least 2-3 years.

Step Four is to initiate a "round table" for Kaliningrad and European businessmen. It will turn into an influential and ongoing business-forum developing recommendations not only for regional as well as federal representative and executive agencies of State power, but also for the EU.

The forum is able to promote exchange of development strategies, economic information, conduct its thorough analysis, expand cooperation between economists and carry out joint research. This process could be initiated by the Representation of Chamber of Commerce of Hamburg in Kaliningrad as well as by a local division of the RF Chamber of Trade and Industry. Extended relations between domestic business and the EU are important: added value is not built on empty declarations. Not to agree with each other is better than not to talk at all.

Step Five is to propose Kaliningrad as a venue for regular meetings of non-governmental organizations of the RF and the EU. In practice this would be an establishment of the public forum "Russia-EU". Its objective would be to promote rapprochement of peoples and the formation of civil society. The implementation of this process would also require the involvement of the regional Public Chamber.

In addition, Kaliningrad has to be suggested as a platform for the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. Deputies of the European Parliament, the Polish Sejm and the Lithuanian Seimas, the State Duma of the RF, the regional Duma and members of the Council of Federation of the RF could hold political dialogue. This will allow Russia to advocate its interests while interacting with European organizations, even if they are as "inconvenient" as the European Council on Foreign Relations. Parliamentary cooperation contributes to the approximation

of legal frameworks in the spheres of standardization, health care, pharmaceuticals, phytosanitary measures, environmental protection, technical regulation, fisheries, informatics, agriculture, competition, automotive industry, telecommunications, and customs.

Step Six is to initiate active cooperation with the European police agency on the basis of the agreement signed during the summit in Rome back in 2003. This will improve the efficiency of combating transnational crime, terrorism, economic crimes, financial fraud, illegal immigration and narcotrafficking.

There is clear evidence of breaches of Article 31 of the RF Constitution. The most odious officials are indignant about the fact that the “worthless society” is “impudently” protesting. Persecution of citizens on political grounds should be put to an end, regardless of the fact whether the persecuted individual is a demonstrator, a picketer, a deputy, a journalist, or a public figure.

Step Seven is to begin the development of a unified system of higher education with the European Union. Cooperation at the level of secondary education should be promoted, taking place directly between schools, lyceums and gymnasiums. The RF accession to the Bologna Process, which has been in force for as long as 11 years, contributes to this initiative. In addition, Kaliningrad needs a serious and authoritative linguistic school.

When advocating national interests, one should not only enjoy the beams of victories which frequently are merely phantoms, but also use the differing points of view among EU actors and engage in civilized bargaining. We should put an end to walking on the rake as only on the basis of reciprocal tracks and approximation of positions can one attain the desired effect.

We should keep insisting on the appointment of an authority figure, either vice-minister of the federal government, or deputy head of the presidential administration, who would be responsible for the coordination of activities dealing with integrated development of the Oblast. As an alternative, it may be reasonable to grant the Oblast the status of a separate federal district, investing the governor with the authority of the head (plenipotentiary envoy of the President of the RF) of the district and deputy head of the presidential administration. Our unique region has to become a national project of its own. Kaliningrad must win in the acute competitive struggle. Then the Kaliningrad dream will come true.