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“ADVANCING DIVERSITY”

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European Union's Uncertain Future

The State of Romanian-Russian Relations and the Importance of a Bilateral Dialogue

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Stating that the relation between the European Union and Russia is currently blocked by the Ukrainian Crisis means to ignore the conditions related difference between the two entities. Russia is a country having an individual political and strategic identity. Although it launched the project of the Euro-Asiatic Union, Moscow maintains full control of its internal politics and strategically speaking, it is completely independent. In exchange, the European Union's political identity, from a strategic point of view, depends on NATO, on a relatively complicated relation (given that there are NATO member states which are not members of the European Union, such as Turkey and European Union States which are not NATO members, such as Finland or Cyprus). Whereas within its relationship with the Russian Federation, the European Union has the advantage of its demographic, economic and technologic dimension, Russia has the superior advantage of strategic coherence. Subsequently, four elements must be taken into account in order to answer the following question: where is the European Union situated at the beginning of the 21st century?

1. The European Union must apprehend the security-related issues as a geographic and conceptual continuum. From a geographic point of view, this is applied from the closest frontier from the Balkans up to the Caucasians, all along with Central Asia and until the Middle East. From a conceptual point of view, it includes issues ranging from political corruption, criminality, ethnic conflicts, local terrorist attacks within and at the outskirts of the Union to the global terrorism of post-modern World War I. Europe is no longer a safe place; the concept of an "inclusive Europe", which is much more operational beyond its stretched frontiers or at least as things used to be so far, must become a fundamental principle of the social conception related to security.
2. Security cooperation between the European Union and Russia is perceived as implausible not so long ago, as attempting means to create a differentiation space between the European Union and the United States of America and that was initially rejected by the Union due to the same reasons, now starts to take shape as part of triangular cooperation, but not quite as an alliance for the future.
3. The continuation of the expansion of the Union to the East and South (which happened in 2004-2007-2013).
4. The institutional reconstruction of the European Union to the extent

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to which it can cope with the challenges of the 21st century, see the migration crisis originating from civil wars in Africa and the Middle East, which demonstrates the Union's weakness and lack of cohesion to cope with it.

Due to these reasons, the Ukrainian Crisis must not be taken as a single cause for the diminishing of the bilateral relations. It is just an "accident to pass", in a report that has many favourable premises as well as many challenges. Consequently, an analysis of the relations between them, which sets an exclusive highlight on the Ukrainian situation, risks getting stuck in insignificant details and not observing the future potential.

Complementarity

Above all, the relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation are huge favourable premises ensued from the complementarity of the two entities. The European Union is a union of intensely populated States, subject to great pressures of irregular immigration, whilst Russia occupies a huge surface and has a relatively reduced population, in decrease. At the same time, the European Union has an extremely high technological level and life standard, whilst Russia is still scarce in both aspects. Between the two entities, the need for infrastructural investments creates exceptional business opportunities in fields such as energy, industry or agriculture.

Similarities

Although it is recent that Europe and Russia sometimes interpret special political and military parts antagonistic, there is a certainty: the Russian culture is a component of the European culture. Byzantine Christianity, the modernization that started with the reign of Peter the Great, even the forced modernization from the communist period tied Russia to Europe, at the level of material and spiritual civilization. With its specific traits, the great country that stretches on two continents is part of the European civilization, which pushed up to the Pacific. The circumstance is best visible nowadays in Siberia: the silent battle that Russia declares against China in Oriental Siberia is the battle of the European civilization against the Asiatic civilization.

Promising perspectives

There are a few strategic fields of activity in which a potential closeness between Moscow and Brussels and could open exceptional horizons to both parties. For example, the energy field, in which Europe can ensure its necessary resources for its own economic development and Russia can obtain a sustainable and profitable outlet. Agriculture is suitable ground that could create a synergy between the European Union and the Russian Federation. Given the European experience in agriculture and food security on the one hand and the underdeveloped potential of Russian agriculture, good relations between two actors could grow up in this aspect. Moreover, the new concept of Food Security, which, apart from the aspects related to agricultural production, also touches aspects related to a political decision,

commerce, economic policies, poverty and food waste, may also become a field of cooperation between the two entities.

Contradictions

The main impediment in which a more substantial closeness is needed between the two players in the strategic condition of the European Union. Taking into account that it does not have its own military and thus in an ambiguous position towards NATO, the European Union is subject to external turbulences. The Ukrainian Crisis is just an episode of this complex relationship between the European political organization and the Euro-Atlantic military one. Tensions and pressures outside Europe (especially from Washington) imposed unwanted behaviours during the crises from the former Yugoslavia – especially during the bombardments in 1999 – or Iraq. Not once, the strategic dependency on the United States of America imposed Europe to waive the promotion of its direct interests. It is supposed that this disturbing factor shall continue, even though the European Union indicates that it is in search of a better-defined strategic identity.

Nevertheless, although the European Union was less dependent on the United States of America, the second perturbing factor would appear in its relation with the Russian Federation: the difference between the two entities in terms of dimensions. A Europe that would integrate Russia would inevitably be a Europe led by Russia (the greatest country with the greatest number of inhabitants and with the most powerful army), which the European Union cannot accept, irrespective of the economic advantages that would result from this synergy. The standard life differences in favour of the Union and the technological and financial handicap of Moscow are quite obvious; the European prejudice related to Russia are factors that must be dealt with since they contradict its leadership position. The opinion of the Russian population cannot be neglected if a potential closeness costs Moscow certain concession towards the European model. The European Union benefits from a quite bad image in most of the Russian population, and it is not easy to anticipate the reaction of the majority if Brussels demands certain reforms into the Russian society.

Romania's role in the new reality European Union – Russia

There is a certain contradiction between the position of Romania from the eastern frontier of the European Union and the very poor relations between Bucharest and Moscow. The causes of these poor relations are complex, and it is not realistic to hope for a sudden and complete change. Neither before the Ukrainian crisis was the bilateral Romanian – Russian relations brighter in political or economic aspects. It is only at the level of cultural changes that we can speak of a beginning of debacle, although the premises of success are not gathered as long as the projects of the Romanian Cultural Institute prevail on the occidental cultural market.

Before the Ukrainian Crisis, nevertheless, Romania did not represent a disturbing factor in the relations between the European Union and Russia. We must also include the internal political factor: the new presidency of

Romania seems less adventurous at the level of anti-Russian statements, and the domestic political relations changed for the better as opposed to the previous period. We can assess that if the situation in Ukraine turns normal at the level of great European powers, a normalization process can be triggered in the relations with Russia, Romania's position shall get in line with these tendencies.

This shall not mean, nevertheless, that the Bucharest program related to the consolidation of defence and military collaboration with the United States of America (anti-missile shield, F16 defence procurement, other military projects) will cease. Romania's necessity for defence determines the continuation of such collaboration. NATO frame is large enough to cover a bilateral military collaboration between Romania and the United States of America, irrespective of the potential normalization of the relations between Russia and the European Union.

This is the reason why an analysis of the Romanian role in the relations between the European Union and Russia must take such conditions into account, as well as the fact that Bucharest is far from being a leading force of the Union. For example, it can be assessed that Romania does not oppose such normalization of the relations between Europe and Russia if it is decided by the great European powers. But it is not realistic to believe that a potential transformation of the Romanian – Russian bilateral relations can transform Romania into a champion of the closeness between Russian and the European Union, for the simple reason that Romania does not have the power to convince other members of the European Union.

Regarding the future relations, Romania has a special position within the EU due to 1) its reduced dependency on the energy imports from Russia, 2) the absence of industrial and agricultural export resources on the Russian market, 3) the existence of a collision of strategic interests related to the Republic of Moldova, and 4) the existence of a residual layer of anti-Russian feelings in the country.

Yet, the importance of a good relationship with the Russian Federation can be neglected for any capital, especially for one geographically situated close to Russia, such as Bucharest. This is the reason why a favourable moment to get back to the normal course of the bilateral Romanian – Russian relations is expected after the relaxation of the relations at the European Union level (following positive evolutions in Ukraine). The softening of the tone regarding offensive oratory and the continuation of the normal cultural relations can contribute to this normalization.



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