

Baltic Forum Conference, Jurmala  
**The EU and Russia in 2008: In Search of New Approaches**  
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What is the Russia – EU center? Well, it is the only think thank which actually deals with EU – Russia relations. So this is a pretty unique mission. Three main aims are: to provide a platform for dialogue between the EU and Russia, to try to encourage the member states to speak with one voice to Russia and to stress the importance of EU rule of law. Now, how are the EU – Russia relations today? According to the press conference Boris Yeltsin gave once in NATO, when an interviewer once asked: “How is the Russian economy, Mr. President?” he said “Bad!” And the interviewer said: “Mr. President, would you like to elaborate your answer?”, and he said: “Very bad!” And so when Mr. Klimov talks about a new chum and Mr. Savickis talks about Latvia being a bridge, perhaps the most appropriate song we should have for the relationship is “Bridge over troubled waters”, because that is what we need to do – establish a bridge over very troubled waters between the EU and Russia.

I think that perhaps the worst is when you look at the rhetoric coming from Moscow and also from some EU member states, it has certainly changed over last two years. I was in conferences when Putin gave his famous speech and then, if you look at what Sergey Lavrov was saying this year in Bucharest, it was a very different tone. And certainly the initial rhetoric from Medvedev is very different to what was coming out from Moscow a couple of years ago. And I think it is because Russia realizes who is the stupid one. There is simply no more important partner for Russia than the EU. We heard the trade statistics – much of Russian trade is with the EU, we know how much Russia wants programmes on the EU, we know how much Russian needs EU investment and technology in various fields. This is the partner, as Mr. Ekeus said, from heaven. But why does so often, at the moment, it appear to be a hellish partnership instead of a heavenly partnership? And the reason is – we are talking past each other. There are simply not enough real dialogs going on. At the ministerial level and so often on official level somebody comes, reads the speech, but there is no discussion. We talk past each other. Therefore there should be improvement and the mechanisms of dialogue, we have to understand each other better where we are coming from and we have to be willing to change our mentality to win-win situations.

There are so many areas where we should be looking at win-win situations. If you look, for example, at various issues that will come up in the new treaty, and there I would take an exception at what Mr. Jurgens said - I don't think that just one political agreement is needed here: we want the agreements. Everything should be on the table. And nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. And this agreement must stand as the public opinion because, as Michael Webb said, this must be ratified in all 27 member states plus in the Duma and plus in the European Parliament. And important also is the image of the Russia and the member states; public opinion plays a very important role now in politics. And it will be impossible to get any treaty ratified if Russia will be characterized by further corruption, by further cases like the British Council. That will damage the image of Russia and you can forget about the chances for any treaty to be ratified.

Now to get situation moving to right direction, we already had examples this morning from Rolf Ekeus of how Russia could be cooperating with the EU in a number of areas. The most obvious is energy efficiency. Russia looses more gas each year than France consumes in a year. What a ridiculous waste! And what an obvious area for cooperation between the EU and Russia in terms of energy efficiency. What we have to do is of course treat Russia as it is, not treat Russia as we would like it to be. We need a reality check; the EU has some influence, but not a huge influence, on Russia. This doesn't mean that we are giving up on our values, because it is the core the EU stands by. But what we should ask Russia is what Russia has already signed up for and that is Russian commitments under the Council of Europe in terms of democracy, human rights, rule of law and international obligations. So, nothing more, nothing less than what Russia has signed up for is what EU should be here insisting on.

The EU should also be far more self-confident in dealing with Russia. In terms of population - 480 million against 140 million - this is the largest internal market in the world and it is 10 times richer than Russia. We have a lot of cards on our hands in terms of negotiating with Russia if we really speak in one voice. And this is why it is important for every state - Latvia, Lithuania as much as Germany and UK - to understand that you are likely to get a far better deal across the whole spectrum of issues by negotiating through the EU than when trying to do anything on your own here. I think, gradually the member states are beginning to recognize that.

What does Russia have to do? I think someone already mentioned that: recognize EU as the best partner. I know, it is very tempting to cut bilateral deals and splitting deals, but in the long term it is not really in the interest of Russia. I think there needs to be a far greater understanding in Russia of what the EU actually is. There should be an increase of training programs, information programs and the change of rhetoric. Over the last two years of controlled media has given us a permanently negative view about the EU. So how can you say you want to be a strategic partner to someone and your media rubbish it all the time? I think there has to be a rather more objective understanding of what the EU is about.

I am also surprised about the continuation on what I would call old-fashion rhetoric from the elite circles in Moscow. We hear people talking about balance of power, spheres of influence, something what is really gone from the rhetoric in the European Union. We have to arrange another meeting to talk of how you develop security through cooperation, but not against each other by security cooperation. And here again coming back to the win – win agenda. Let's look at what happened yesterday in Moscow where you had 50 thousand British fans traveling without visas and without any problem. Let's take it as an example of how we can preside world's attitude towards visa free area. I think it is not going to be a problem for anyone here.

And finally, one important aspect is the question of history. It is very important to have a dialogue about why we have very different views of some key aspects of history. I know that Finland facilitated the dialogue with Estonians and Russians on the memorial, but it is something that should be taken into account. There are serious issues in terms of why we can talk past each other in terms of issues that happened a century ago - it is important to clear this up.

So to sum up we want changed mentality, we want to look forward to trying to make this bridge over the troubled waters as strong as possible by looking at as many areas of cooperation as possible and this means more open dialogue in such forums as this and we need to multiple them. Thank you!