

Baltic Forum Conference, Jurmala
The EU and Russia in 2008: In Search of New Approaches
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Urban AHLIN, Member of the Swedish Parliament

Over the years I have been participating in many conferences, where we were speaking about the EU - Russia relations. And for me as a politician it is quite interesting to see the trends; what is on the agenda today; what are we talking about; what kind of language are we using. I must say that I am really disappointed with the last two seminars I have been to. One was in Rome few days ago and I met many of you there.

Let me start with one of the topics - conflict between the common values and the common interests. I cannot understand that. When I am listening to you from Innsbruck, I realize that in questioning the EU we are not using the same kind of value-based system, when we are negotiating with China. If you would have said these ten years ago, Russians would have been angry, saying: "Hey, we do not want to be compared with China!" which, I think, is right. I mean, China is a communist dictatorship, which, of course, we in the EU do not have any common values with. Russia is different. It is not any longer a communist dictatorship, but we have a wish to have common values. And we also have common interests. There is no one in the EU so stupid, who thinks that this partnership agreement we are dealing with in the future will only be about the common values. Of course, not! We have common interests as well. But we should also have common values into it. And is it really like that - common values would affect economy negatively in Russia? Of course, not! Is democracy dangerous to economic growth? Of course, not! Rule of law is good. It is against the corruption, it creates stable rules. It is very good for the economy to live in such circumstances. Is freedom of speech dangerous for the economic growth? Of course, not! It is good to have freedom for people to actually go out to media and say something about corruption, if they see it; or whistle-blowers in big companies and the state structures if they see something going wrong. We have seen that in the United States many, many times. It is very good to have that.

So, I cannot really understand why we have come to a point where the Russians are applauding people, who just talk about the common interests. And we, who believe in common values, are seen as some kind of enemies to Russia. How could it be so? I do believe that Russia is different from China. I do believe that Russia is a European country. I do believe that the Russian population would live in a society, which is based on the same common values as we have in the EU. I think actually that it is a good starting point for the negotiations and for trying to foster a better relationship between Russia and the EU. But if the starting point is that Russia is so different that it cannot discuss the common values, this partnership agreement will be very limited, my friends.

The second topic I have been frustrated about, when I was in Rome is this. There was an MP coming from Portuguese parliament, saying that I am coming from a country, Portugal that is the most far away from Russia; and since I am the most far away I can be the most objective about what is happening in the Russian Federation. It is amazing. It is fantastic to hear such kind of statements. That the neighboring countries, we who live in close to Russia, we do not understand anything about Russia. Of course, we do! Do you think that a South African knows more about Zimbabwe, than he knows about Chile?! Yes, of course he knows more about Zimbabwe, than he knows about Chile! But there were a lot of Russians in the Forum in Rome that were applauding, really saying, yeah, great! Now I must say for a Swede, it is a little bit interesting to see this trend. Because if you look into history; if you look into economy you see that prosperous countries have prosperous neighbors. When the Soviet Union broke down, Sweden, the Swedish Parliament, the Swedish government, we were very much engaged in trying to help Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia because we thought that was in our own interests; to have stable democracies as neighbors, to have a good trade with them is good for us. I look around of the Globe - prosperous countries have prosperous neighbors because most of the trade is to your neighbors. And that goes back to the question about NATO, NATO and the enlargement. I actually belong to a party that is very much questioning the NATO, NATO's existence. We are not looking for a membership of NATO. But for me it sounds interesting, when Russian says, oh, why is NATO pushing its border closer to the Russian border? I think Moscow; I think Russia should consider why is it that a huge majority of the Georgian population would like to join NATO. They are pretty far away from Brussels, but they are pretty close to Russia. What can Russia do differently to have prosperous neighbors not looking for memberships of NATO or other organizations? Because I actually think, the question is wrongly put. It should be asked in Moscow: why is it like it is? Maybe we are doing something wrong here. And remember prosperous countries do have prosperous neighbors.

And the more I have been thinking about why we have these kind of difficulties between the EU and Russia, I have been more and more certain that it is about, what Robert Cooper in his book 'The

Breaking of Nations' called 'the different faces' that countries can have from being pre-modern, where there is no state, there is not a national identity, it is hard to find a border. Modern states, where there is a strong national identity, sovereignty is very important and you have strict borders to the countries that Robert Cooper has called post-modern states, where a border is soft, where the political leaders realize that, ok, we need to give up some of our sovereignty to a supra-national body, because we can gain something from that. Most of the countries in the EU, I am not saying all of them, because some of the countries, the new-comers in the EU, are a little bit still in the modern state phase, but most of the countries of the EU are in the post-modern phase. We realize that we need to give up some of our sovereignty to gain something on a supra-national level. But Russia is in its forming state of the national identity of the modern state. So, therefore, I think it is very hard for the Russian political elite to give up some of its sovereignty into international organizations or to agreements with the EU. I am very optimistic for the future. I am. I do not believe that Russia of today is something close to what the Soviet Union was; not at all. I am very optimistic, but we need to be realistic about these different phases of what is the EU, what is Russia trying to form as a modern nation-state. But all the time that we in the EU will discuss with you in the Russian Federation, it will be based on common values, because we do believe that Russia belongs to the EU, and that it should be viewed as a very good gesture from the EU. Trying to suggest that we should deal with you as we deal with China should actually upset Russia.