

NORTHWEST RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE NORTHERN DIMENSION

DR. TATIANA ROMANOVA

School of International Relations

St. Petersburg State University

Romanova@dip.pu.ru

Russian has been an essential part of the Northern Dimension from the very start of this activity. With the accession of the Baltic countries and Poland to the European Union (and keeping in mind a very tight affiliation of Norway and Iceland to the European Union) Russia is the only partner of the Northern Dimension that is “really outside” of the European Union. In fact the Northern Dimension is turning to a cooperation of Russia and the European Union in the North (although there are numerous suggestions about other non-EU countries joining the Northern Dimension). The recent Council of the EU conclusions state that “the Northern Dimension will focus increasingly on North West Russia and on its particular challenges affecting the other parties.”¹

Because of this very unique position of Russia in the Northern Dimension, Russia’s position has to be given a very careful attention during current debates on the future of the Northern Dimension and efforts to reform this programme.

The presentation is structured in four parts. The first part deals with the initial Russia’s reaction to the Northern Dimension. The second one is devoted to some useful experience that has been acquired for the last five years. The third one addresses the question, why the Northern Dimension has recently returned to Russia’s public discussions and what aspirations are linked to it. Finally, I will address the issue how the Northern Dimension and the Roadmaps on four spaces can reinforce each other.

INITIAL BACKLASH AGAINST THE NORTHERN DIMENSION.

The Northern Dimension was, as it is well known, launched by Finland after its accession to the European Union to preserve a unique perspective on the northern neighbours of the European Union, in particular, Russia. The discussions started in earnest in 1997-1998 and the First Action Plan was adopted in 2000 for the three-year period, followed by the Second one in 2003 (for the period of 2004-2006).

Curiously, the discussions on the Northern Dimension in Russia peaked in 2001 and then quickly went down. There were multiple reasons for that.

1. Involvement

Russian participants took the initiative as a unilateral EU action somehow imposed on Russia and other EU neighbours. It is true that Finland gathered representatives of all the countries of the region in the run-up to the preparation of the first action plan. At the same

¹ Brussels, 21 November 2005. 14701/05 (Presse 305).

time they were listened to BEFORE the development of the Action Plan and did not take any part in the eventual choice of the priorities and directions of activities. This severely alienated Russian actors.

Ironically, the initiative was presented on the EU's side as ground-breaking, as "a hole in the wall"² of the fortress Europe, a hole that allows the non-EU partners to participate in the decision-shaping in the Northern Dimension and in the monitoring of the process of implementation. Russia perceived itself as an object and not a subject of the process whereas EU scholars and politicians assured that the Northern Dimension was an effort to provide Russia with the subjectivity.

The Second Action Plan tried to enlarge this EU opening to the non-EU countries of the region. This was done through the emphasis on the participation of all the interested parties in the preparation and implementation of the decision (but again not decision-making!), through the declarations on subsidiarity and synergy between different actors, through the establishment of the Senior Officials Meeting. However, by that time Russian partners were quite disappointed and did not answer the EU's move. The Russian took the Northern Dimension as a regime that can be either taken or ignored (but not modified and supplemented).³ At the end of the day they chose to ignore this regime. The deficit of Russia's involvement and participation was probably the main drawback of the Northern Dimension.

2. The Agenda

The agenda of the Northern Dimension was perceived as being based on the Nordic experience, often without any reference to Russia's needs. This was particularly visible through the emphasis on such issues as the environment and public health and relative unimportance of, for example, economics. At some points Russian journalists even entertained with the idea of defining the Northern Dimension as nothing but environment.⁴

The problem, however, was deeper, because the federal and regional authorities took the Action Plan as something dealing with the EU's concerns about Russia, as an effort to avoid negative interdependence of Russia's geographical proximity and not to engage Russia in a mutually beneficial cooperation.

At the same time Russian authorities would have liked to see cooperation in the field of tourism, research and higher education that would have allowed for the use of resources located primarily in St. Petersburg and would have ensured North-Western Russia's competitive advantage. They also wanted cooperation to move from orientation to the export of natural resources to orientation on industrial and post-industrial cooperation.⁵

² Haukkala, H. A Hole in the Wall? Dimensionalism and the EU's "New Neighbourhood Policy". Helsinki, 2003. Working Paper. No 41.

³ See Lanko, D. Northwestern Russia and Northern Dimension. Northwest Russia's Approaches to Northern Dimension. St.Petersburg, 2003. Unpublished.

⁴ Bovt G. Ne kanalizatsiey edinoy (Not Only Sewerage) // Izvestia, October 24, 2001.

⁵ Vystuplenie Ministra inostrannyh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii S.V. Lavrova na ministerskoi konferentsii po "Severnomu izmereniu". (Speech of the Russia' Ministry of Foreign Affairs Serguei Lavrov at the ministerial conference on the Northern Dimension). Brussels, 21 November 2005.

3. Partners on the Russian side

From its very beginning the Northern Dimension was targeted at the regions of Russia's North-West. The timing was, however, extremely unlucky. The year 2000 was the time when President Vladimir Putin was elected and his vision of recreation of the "vertical of power" predominated. A natural consequence of this policy was severe curtail of the responsibilities of the region and mistrust to any legal differentiation of the regions. Decentralisation was perceived as a security threat and local administration did not want to create tensions with the federal authorities. It is quite significant that in 2004 Valentina Matvienko, Governor of St. Petersburg, stressed in an interview on the Northern Dimension that the Northern Dimension of the European Union was supposed to develop European cooperation in general, to create conditions for the integration of Russia and the European Communities (although the question was about the meaning of this cooperation for the city of St. Petersburg).⁶

At the same time St. Petersburg and the whole North-West of Russia were in a more privileged position than the rest of Russia. Several facts explain this phenomenon. First is the link between Mr. Putin and St. Petersburg. Second is the fact that at no point in its history St. Petersburg declared any secessionist intentions while at the same time famously serving as a "window to Europe" for around 300 years.

In parallel to the tension between the regions and the federal centre the problem of the absence of necessary structures at the regional and federal levels surfaced. Some federal laws were missing (like the law on the frontier territories or cross-border cooperation). Often there was no clarity in the division of responsibilities between the federal and regional levels, and where responsibilities were more or less clear the needed structure, which would facilitate cooperation with the partners in the Northern Dimension, was missing.

These Russia's structural difficulties further complicated cooperation in the Northern Dimension.

4. Partners on the EU's side

The institutional structure of the Northern Dimension also presented considerable difficulties to Russian players. This issue had two aspects. The first one is the question of partner. Finland was the country that initiated the process, and this was the partner associated in Russia with the image of an honest broker⁷, genuinely interested in the mutually beneficial cooperation. The initiative was, however, quickly subsumed by the EU (as Helsinki intended it to be). However, this change of the partner led to a profound mistrust of some regional politicians that perceived (and sometimes still perceive) the EU as a secondary actor, lacking coherence and struggling with internal disorder.

⁶ Interview s Gubernatorom Sankt-Pterburga Valentinoi Matvienko (Interview of the Governor of St.Petersburg Valentina Matvienko) // BALTINFO. 2004. April-May.

⁷ Voronov K. "Severnoe izmerenie": zatyanyuvshiysya debut (Northern Dimension: Protracted Debut) // Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. 2003. No 2.

The second aspect of the problem is the fact that the Northern Dimension lacked any definite institutional structure. It was meant to be an umbrella to multiple existing and new initiatives and organisations. As a result it was equated in Russia to the *Potemkin's villages*, evoking the notion of a not very trust-worthy favourite of Catherine the Second and his deceiving activities.

5. Financial Aspect

The absence of any financial resources or definite budget line for the Northern Dimension also decreased the interest of the Russian players to the cooperation. The question was not so much about the use of EU resources but rather about the resources of international banks (like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB)). This discussion was similar to many others conducted between the European Union and Russia in other fora (for example, the Energy Dialogue).

The net result of these five factors was a very sceptical attitude of the Russians to the Northern Dimension. The federal authorities viewed the initiative suspiciously while the regional authorities became increasingly disappointed in view of their limited influence on the definition and implementation of the projects.

The result of nearly five years of cooperation was summarized by Russia's minister for foreign affairs Serguei Lavrov, who in a recent speech admitted that Russia had not participated in the Northern Dimension *in practical terms* because Moscow insisted on the change of the basis of realization of this initiative.⁸

ACHIEVEMENTS, DESPITE ALL THE DIFFICULTIES?

However, the Northern Dimension was not without the achievements. The most stunning results are provided by the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership (NDEP). The Northern Dimension has managed to bring the environmental issue from silence to salience in the North-West Russia for the last five years. This happened through multiple initiatives.

1. Development of a complex programme of utilization of nuclear submarines in the North of Russia, including the safety of used nuclear fuel (In Andreev Bay, Gremikha, Novoya Zemlya etc) – over 15 specific projects. The financial support is provided by the EBRD.
2. Reconstruction of south-west wastewater treatment plant in St. Petersburg. The key goal was to stop pouring wastewaters to the Neva River. The funds are provided by the EBRD, NIB and TACIS programme.

Numerous projects were implemented in the field of energy. The Nordic countries were prompt to provide different mechanisms to finance smaller energy-efficiency measures in the region. The role and experience of such financial institutions as EBRD, NIB, World

⁸ Vystuplenie Ministra inostrannyh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii S.V. Lavrova na ministerskoi konferentsii po "Severnomu izmereniu". (Speech of the Russia' Ministry of Foreign Affairs Serguei Lavrov at the ministerial conference on the Northern Dimension). Brussels, 21 November 2005.

Bank, Nordic Dimension Environment Fund, Nordic Europe Financial Corporation were central in providing smaller grants initially in Poland and the three Baltic countries and more recently in Russia. Energy-efficiency projects were established in Murmansk, Kirovsk, Petrozavodsk, Archangelsk with the purpose of demonstration and multiplication.

Environmental and energy cooperation has been so active that at some point a fear was raised that the Northern Dimension can turn to be just an environmental appendix to the Energy Dialogue.⁹

Furthermore, the issue of greenhouse emissions began to figure prominently on the agenda. Already in 1999 at the conference in Helsinki the Ministers of Energy of the Baltic Sea Region suggested that further work was done to make the Baltic Sea region a testing ground for international co-operation in the use of flexible mechanisms for the reduction of the greenhouse emissions. At the Vilnius conference in 2002 the Ministers of Energy decided to establish the Testing Ground for Flexible Mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol within the BASREC (the forum that earlier had proclaimed itself responsible for the realization of the energy part of the Northern Dimension). Subsequently the Energy Ministers of the Baltic Sea region countries and the European Commission have decided to make the region a testing ground for Joint Implementation projects for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The current target for the year 2005 is to ensure that Testing Ground Agreement is ratified by all the participating parties, to guarantee the synchronization of its policies with the EU and world activities in the field of climate change and involve business representatives in the implementation of the facility.

Finally, the Nordic Investment Bank is the key partner for the completion of the construction of flood barriers for St. Petersburg. They are scheduled to be completed by 2008 and are essential for the development and normal functioning of the city.

Thus the acquired experience has indeed been positive but much more could have been done had the Russian authorities been more active and open to different initiatives. However, the difficulties identified in the first part, prevented that.

RECENT REACTIVATION

The reactivation of the Northern Dimension in Russia's policy in 2005 is linked to three different issues.

The first one was manifested through the interview and official statement of Minister Serguei Lavrov. He took part in several consultations (most recently in the meeting of the Council of Ministers in November) and concluded that the EU was finally transforming the

⁹Tkachev, G., Churov, V. Severnoe izmerenie v kontekste obshchego razvitiya Evropy: vzglyad iz Peterburga (Northern Dimension in the Context of Pan-European Development: A View from St. Petersburg). St. Petersburg: Leontief Center, 2001 // http://www.leontief.ru/rnsc/eng/programs/ndim_doc1_1.htm

logics of the programme so that Russia becomes a genuinely equal partner.¹⁰ This echoed an earlier statement, made by an uncertain Kremlin official, that the Presidential Administration would like to see the Northern Dimension as an equal partnership, based on equality, joint elaboration of the strategy and adequate projects portfolio. In other words, willingness of the EU to take into account Russia's vision and to include it into the decision-shaping and decision-making was met immediately by positive statements from Russia's federal authorities. It is hoped that this positive step will serve as an example for the general EU-Russian economic relations.

Secondly, the Northern Dimension's role was increased by its stark contrast with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which for a while was presented as a substitution of the Northern Dimension following the accession of Poland and the Baltic countries to the European Union. Although being criticised on multiple occasions, the Northern Dimension was perceived to be a much more positive instrument of cooperation.

1. The ENP was perceived as being even more unilateral in its impositions of the EU's values and norms with no concern to Russia's ideas of cooperation. This can be easily deduced through the analysis of the ENP documents' wording.
2. The ENP was taken as a deliberate EU policy of drawing lines and borders as oppose to the efforts of the Northern Dimension to decrease the meaning of borders
3. The ENP seriously touches upon political aspects, which are quite sensitive to Moscow whereas the Northern Dimension concentrates on the low politics aspects.
4. The ENP is a single policy for all the EU members and is only differentiated through the action plans. Initial efforts to put Russia in the same framework with Morocco could hardly been positively perceived by Moscow.

Thus, the negative notion of the ENP facilitated the reactivation of the Northern Dimension.

Last, but not least the adoption of the Roadmaps for the four EU-Russian common spaces also facilitated the change of Russia's position to the Northern Dimension. Although the content, the very concept of the four roadmaps and their 'implementability' are currently much criticized in Russia, the four road maps are characterized by two very important phenomena.

Increased role of private actors. The pressure of the EU-Russian Round Table of Industrialists has grown in importance since the days of its establishment. Initially they supported Russia's one-way transformation and unilateral movement. This can be seen, for example, from the conclusions of the Fourth EU-Russian Round Table of Industrialists that took place in 2002. The document declared that the development of Russia's national legislation in the context of international law, its unification and harmonisation with

¹⁰ Vystuplenie Ministra inostrannyh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii S.V. Lavrova na ministerskoi konferentsii po "Severnomu izmereniu". (Speech of the Russia' Ministry of Foreign Affairs Serguei Lavrov at the ministerial conference on the Northern Dimension). Brussels, 21 November 2005.

European legislation, primarily in the areas that are of practical meaning to the business are key priorities of EU-Russian relations.

The real transformation of the role of the business was brought about by the Roadmap on the Common Economic Space. At the preamble's statements the Roadmap says that "the aim is to put in place conditions which will increase opportunities for economic operators, promote trade and investment, facilitate the establishment and operation of companies on a reciprocal basis".¹¹ Thus the belief is quite neofunctional that the private operators being given a chance to conduct free activities will create a pressure on the public administration for the further transformation of the quality of their relations and adoption of new legislation.

The EU-Russian Round Table of Industrialists was prompt to utilize these options. The meeting of October 2005 for the first time in its life did not limit the invitees to the narrow circle of pre-selected people. On the contrary, the companies and private individuals that wanted to participate could freely apply and were invited to the meeting of the Round Table. This strategy ensured that those that were interested in the cooperation did participate and brought their invaluable input into the EU-Russian relations. The report of the Round Table was presented right after the Round Table to the EU-Russian summit.

Last but not least, the last EU-Russian summit decided to invite private parties take part in the discussion on the future of EU-Russian relations. The broad discussions will start in spring 2006. This discussion was initiated in view of the so-called problem 2007, when the PCA is supposed to expire. It is the first time in Russia that private parties are expected to take such a considerable part in the preparation of an international agreement. This definitely shows a change of quality of EU-Russian relations.

This increased emphasis on the private actors gave new impetus to the Northern Dimension, which is based on the private partnership and strong role of NGOs, on the broadest possible involvement of all the interested parties and which acquired some useful experience in this field.

Increased acceptance of Russia as an equal partner, taking part in the decision-making. The so-called New Approach to cooperation was introduced. It includes extensive consultations between the parties.¹²

This transformation will become even more vivid if we compare the initial draft¹³ of the Roadmap with what was eventually adopted at the EU-Russian summit on the 10 May 2005. Firstly, some specific details that were pointing on the EU's regulation were eliminated (i.e. trade in nuclear materials). Secondly, references to the EU's terminology were deleted (i.e.

¹¹ Roadmap on Common Economic Space. Moscow, 10 May 2005.

¹² Ibid. It consists of the following elements, which imply reciprocal movement and close cooperation:

- Discuss and establish a formal framework (terms of reference) for the regulatory dialogue
- Determination of areas and sectors where harmonisation of relevant legislation and practices is appropriate and possible
- As soon as the priorities are determined, launch the work of gradual approximation of relevant legislation and practices
- Identification of procedures for possible recognition of the results of conformity assessment of both sides, including certification of systems of quality and ecological management.

¹³ The Common Economic Space – Building Blocks for Sustained Economic Growth. Consolidated Draft. 23 October 2004. European Commission: Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 25.10.2004. Meeting doc. 397/04.

Pan-European Corridors, compatibility of gas export with the EU's legislation). Thirdly, clauses about universal instruments were added (i.e. references to IMO in case of double-hull tankers, the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea and the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (Helsinki Convention) were not in the initial draft suggested by the European Commission). Fourthly, for the first time Russian documents were mentioned as documents to refer to during the construction of the space. (These are Russia's Energy Strategy to 2020, the Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation, the Main Development Directions of the Water System Management Complex of Russia until 2010.)

Thus the evolution is towards bilateral reciprocal movement of the parties, towards CONvergence, and towards searching for a compromise. The Northern Dimension and the involvement of Russia into shaping of its future reinforce the recent transformations in EU-Russian relations.

HOW CAN THE NORTHERN DIMENSION BE USEFUL TO THE FOUR ROADMAPS.

In conceptual terms there are three possible roles that the Northern Dimension can perform.

1. The Northern Dimension can serve as an arena for the practical realization of some decisions, adopted in the framework of the four common spaces. The existent multi-channel dialogue might facilitate quick implementation and turn the Northern Dimension into a testing ground for the initiatives that develop the concept of spaces.
2. Some decisions within the four spaces are only defined in the framework manner and require further details. This is a result of some profound disagreements between the two partners as well as a natural consequence of inability to foresee all possible developments. The Northern Dimension can server as a mechanism of filling the roadmaps with specific content. This is particularly the case in the field of energy and environment. It is significant that Russian policy-makers and experts insist on the Northern Dimension helping to change the structure of EU-Russian relations from natural resource-based to industrial and post-industrial cooperation and expect serious contribution of the Northern Dimension to this transformation.
3. Finally, the Northern Dimension can stimulate introduction of new initiatives to the common spaces through generalization of experience and mutually advantageous practices. Cooperation with the non-governmental structures and governance through the involvement of different business and NGO partners can be particularly useful in this regard.

In practical terms, the Northern Dimension new Action plan should be structured in accordance with four roadmaps, so as to enable the best possible synergy between the roadmaps and the Northern Dimension. It is, however, obvious, that due to the very nature of the Northern Dimension and the fact that it mainly involves some Russia's regions and not the whole of Russia, its contributions will be mostly to the roadmap for the Common

Economic Space, less substantial to the roadmap for the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice and the roadmap for the Common Space of Research and Education, including Cultural Aspects and virtually non-existent in case of the roadmap for the Common Space of External Security.

In conclusion, I would like to underline again that the current transformation of the Northern Dimension coupled with the launch of the ENP and transformation of the EU-Russian relations present a unique opportunity to both Russian and the European Union. It is a real chance to solve the problems that I identified at the beginning of this text as detrimental for the Northern Dimension and to bring the cooperation to a more practical level. It is also a chance to capitalise on the positive experience of the two previous action plans and to radically transform EU-Russian relations from below through concrete achievements.