



'RESETTING' BETWEEN RUSSIA AND EUROPE AS WELL

1. Russia/EU

Behind schedule on the 'resetting' in the Russo-American relations, in the final phase of 2009 the Euro-Russian relations seem to have improved as well. The turning point came about in the days around the meeting of the Russia-EU counsel in Stockholm on 17th November. Sweden had at last decided to allow to passage on its own Baltic seabed of the Russo-German *North Stream* gas pipeline, thus persuading, at the last moment, President Medvedev to take part personally in the Counsel. (1) The day before, the European Commissioner to energy, Piebalgs, had signed, together with the cabinet minister Shmatko, an important "Memorandum on preventative warning in the energy sphere" and acknowledging the Russian commitment in the prevention of the hydrocarbons supply crisis to Europe. (2) The Counsel was unexpectedly (3) rich in actions of detente: once the dissent had been confirmed on the outcome of the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008, the European part had taken into consideration the Russian desire for a simplification of the procedures for the reciprocal stay visas (a measure particularly supported by Foreign Minister Frattini) (4) and also Medvedev's proposal for a new European security system, which so far has only aroused polite interest among the countries of the Union. (5) In turn, Medvedev put forward his country's swift membership of the WTO, and even alone: that is, not together with Belarus and Kazakhstan, which for some years have set up a customs union with it (EEP), confirmed in late December by a new trilateral treaty. The EEP is suspected by the West of concealing protectionist ends, incompatible with ETO membership. (6)

2. Russia-NATO

On 4th December the first Russia-NATO council meeting was held in Brussels after the Russo-Georgian war. According to the Russian version, the meeting could only take place after Canada had withdrawn its opposition to the reference, in the planned concluding document, of the Russian proposal for a new security system in Europe. In any case, the Secretary of the Alliance, Rasmussen, wanted to have the OECD and not NATO as the appropriate venue

for a discussion on this matter (but the OECD Foreign Ministers, meeting in Athens on 1st December, had already totally ignored the project ...). (7) However, in the Council a sub-group for Afghanistan was formed, which underlines the importance of the Russian contribution to the anti-Taliban coalition. (8) Then on 16th December Rasmussen met the Russian President and Prime Minister in Moscow. The former requested helicopters, spare parts for arming the troops in Afghanistan, fuel and permission to allow the transit of the greatest possible number of military convoys across its territory. In exchange, Russia would like NATO to establish relations with the CSTO military alliance, which it is part of along with a certain number of CIS countries. (9)

3. Russia/Council of Europe

On 22nd December the new Secretary of the EU, Yarland, was in Moscow; *Kommersant* sources judged he intended to “reset” relations in the Council with Russia, after the criticism that the Parliamentary Assembly of this organism (PACE) has been addressing to Russia for a decade on several issues (Chechen war, human rights, Russo-Georgian war). On 20th November, the Russian Constitutional Court had decided to prolong the moratorium on the death penalty, declared in 1997 instead of its abolition (laid down in the 6th Protocol of the European Convention on human rights for the member countries of the Council). Moreover, the text adopted by the Court allows us to envisage the true and proper abolition of the death penalty in the near future. (10) It is a brave step by the Court, in a country in which the opinion surveys have for some time been showing an anti-abolitionist majority. (11) Probably in answer to that step, on 14th December the Ministers’ Committee of the Council decided to take into account the reasons for which Russia had refused, since 2006, to ratify the 14th Protocol of the Convention, which provided for the reform of the European Tribunal for Human Rights, and to pass the proposal that a judge belonging to the country against which the case had been submitted to the court should also be admitted in the Tribunal’s panel of judges (three judges). A few days later, President Medvedev returned the favour, asking the Duma to ratify the 14th Protocol.

4. Russia and the Lisbon Treaty

The press has continued to comment on the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in cautiously satisfied terms. From now on, the Union will be stronger and more united, the weight of the single States will diminish, the “vertical power” will be enhanced within it and this will foster the influence of France and Germany, Russia’s traditional partners. However, it is not certain that this country will still manage, as in the past, to draw any advantage from the intra-European disagreements. (12) On the other hand, it will be hard for one or two countries to block the whole of Euro-Russian relations, as Poland did a couple of years ago. (13) Another authoritative commentator foresees that the diminishment of the power of the single States could lead them to act in groups, for example: 1) France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg; 2) Eastern Europe; 3) Baltic States; 4) Scandinavia. (14) Hence, Russia will not be able to limit itself to counting on the support of the first group but will also have to seek that of some of the other groups. The Lisbon Treaty will not necessarily be advantageous to Russia in its relations with a Europe that will remain heterogeneous. More in general, the German analysts A. Rahr and the Russian S. Karaganov have expressed themselves, once more, in favour of a Euro-Russia ‘alliance’, the guarantor of a world role for Europe, on the one hand, and the Russian civil and economic progress, on the other. (15)

However, the election of “unknown” characters, like van Rompuy and Ashton has raised some doubts over the degree of unity that the EU will actually be able to express: *Novaya gazeta* has put this choice down to Gordon Brown’s attempt to keep the Union weak. (16) And *Nezavisimaya* has not missed the Swedish declarations according to which unanimity will still be necessary for the European decisions on foreign policy; nor those of von Rompuy, on the need for future compromises to satisfy *each* member-country. (17) Lastly, it is worth noting that the visit to Rome of a large Russian delegation led by Medvedev, on 3rd December, seems to want to be a reminder of the bilateral relations with his chief friends in Europe. (18) Finally, a particularly acidic commentator has repeated the notion according to which nationalism and the different historical background prevent the birth of a common identity between European countries: and that the Union is no more than the result of a Franco-German intrigue. (19) There have also been those who have called upon Russian public opinion to break with “a limited Eurocentrism” and turn more attention to the processes of

economic integration between the Asian countries (APEC, ASEAN), rather than to the fall of the Berlin Wall or to Russo-Polish relations, since Russia is "a great Pacific power". (20)

5. Medvedev/Putin: apparent disagreements?

The comment continue on some of Medvedev's public comments from last September (the most important of which is "Come on, Russia!", on the 10th), in which the president exhorted his country to democratisation and modernisation: at time in prudent terms, at times energetic. In Berlin for the celebrations on the 9th November, he also took his distance from the notorious definition of the Soviet collapse as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century", uttered time ago by Putin. (21) The reactions waver between varying degrees of scepticism. *Novaya gazeta* believes that Medvedev will not change the policy of the bloc of social forces, which had formed under Eltsin and Putin (22), but opened its pages also to opinions that credit Medvedev as a potential Gorbachev. (23) A brilliant liberal analyst defines the President as "a Republican on the throne" in the manner of tsar Alexander I, as devoted to popular liberty, as he was reluctant to undertake real changes, which were inevitably risky. (24) *Nezavisimaya gazeta* continues to lend militant support to the words of the President. Its director has stressed how Putin had overtly ignored them but also complains of the lack of an adequate team and a precise programme in the Medvedev field. (25) From abroad, the World Bank has complained that there is a lack of clarity of the institutional roles filled, respectively, by the Russian President and Prime Minister; that any disagreements are not resolved democratically and that Medvedev does not seem to act in coherence with his words. (26)

An authoritative Russian analyst has tried to draw up a balance of Medvedev's foreign policy. Putin also continues to carry out an active foreign policy (which upsets the traditional division of tasks between the President and the Prime Minister) but seems to do so above all in the role of director of the sales office of *Gazprom*. However, it is clear that Medvedev does not share the reluctance of his Prime Minister as concerns joining the WTO. Medvedev's idea of a new system of European security could only be a failure: but the breakthrough in relations with the USA has come about, mostly thanks to his open position to possible sanctions against Iran. Medvedev's abandonment of the "hysterical"

approach to the foreign policy of his predecessors has also taken place in regard to his relations with Europe: his positive evaluation of the Lisbon process, the opposition to the death penalty, the intention to get the Duma to pass the 4th Protocol. (27)

- (1) V.Kuzmin, *Po puti v Evropu*, Rossiiskaya gazeta, 18-11-2009.
- (2) V.Solovev, N.Grib, *U Rossii i Evropy vse kuby zapisany*, Kommersant, 17-11-2009.
- (3) Idem, *Rossiya vstupaet na vsekh frontakh*, ivi, 19-11-2009.
- (4) Il rappresentante russo presso l'Unione, Chizhov, ha espresso pubblica gratitudine al "buon amico" italiano: A Terekhov, *Rossiya budet ulushat svoi imidzh v Evroparlamente*, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 22-12-2009.
- (5) N.Surkov, *Rossiya i Evropa srobotali "na pyaterku"*, ivi, 19-11-2009.
- (6) *Gud-bai WTO! Da zdrazdvuet Tamozhennyi soyuz*, ivi, 30-12-2009.
- (7) Solovev, *MID upolnomochen udivit*, Kommersant, 2-12-2009.
- (8) Idem, *NATO snachala popugali*, ivi, 5-12-2009
- (9) G.Sysoev, *Vizit po linii afganskogo fronta*, ivi, 17-12-2009.
- (10) A.Gabuev, *Turbern Yarland primut po 14-mu protocolu*, ivi, 22-12-2009.
- (11) E.Bilevskaya, *Visshaya mera v podveshennom sostoyanii*, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 10-11-2009.
- (12) Gabuev, *V Evrope budut i vlasti, i vertikal*, Kommersant, 5-11-2009.
- (13) P.Tarasenko, *Prezident iz shef-povara*, ivi, 20-11-2009.
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- (16) Tarasenko, *Evrosoyuz uravnyali s dvumya neizvestnyimi*, Kommersant, 21-11-2009; A.Mineev, *Politrynok/Evropa*, Novaya gazeta, 23-11-2009.
- (17) A.Terekhov, *Evropa nachala novyi etap integratsii*, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 2-12-2009.
- (18) Kuzmin, *Dorogi, vedushchie v Rim*, Rossiiskaya gazeta, 4-12-2009.
- (19) E.Bazhanov, *UE: budushchaya sverkhderzhava ili plod politiceskikh intrig?*, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 23-12-2009.
- (20) V.Ryzhkov, *Ottulkuvshis ot Stenu*, Novaya gazeta, 9-11-2008.
- (21) Gabuev, *Dmitrii Medvedev vyshel v prokat*, Kommersant, 9-11-2009.
- (22) V.Ryzhkov, *Ottulknuvshis ot Stenu*, Novaya gazeta, 9-11-2008.
- (23) E.Bai, *Rossiya vernulas v gorbachevskuyu epokhu*, ivi, 21-12-2009.
- (24) D.Furman, *Respublikanets na trone*, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 9-11-2009.

- (25) K.Remchukov, *Tak zhit nelzya! Ili vse-taki mozhno?*, ivi, , 15-12-2009.
- (26) E.Bilevskaya, *Evropeiskii bank ne obnaruzhil v Rossii "tsentra initsiativ"*, ivi, 8-12-2009.
- (27) E.Kuznetsova, *Menyayushchiysya golos Moskvy v mire*, ivi, 29-12-2009.