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A THEORETICAL APPROACH ON THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Abstract *The purpose of this paper is to explore the theoretical approaches of the „strategic partnership” concept, and then applying them to the relationship and cooperation between the European Union and the Russian Federation, thus emphasizing its evolution. The base of this article lays on a literature review that gathers recent articles and several studies of some researchers in the field, providing some professional information on the subject. Findings reveal that there has not yet got to a general definition of the concepts, researchers and not only would agree upon, and, when applying it to the EU-Russia relation, that there are some mutual benefits as a result of the cooperation. This article shows that, despite of the fact that the startup of the cooperation between the two major global powers was a good one, it now has reached some kind of dead moment, when policy contradictions block the evolution of the partnership.*

Keywords: Strategic partnership; cooperation; European Union; Russian Federation; evolution; policy
JEL Classification: F00; F15; F36; F42; F50

Introduction

There is a large number of hypotheses that support the definitions of the term “partnership”. First of all, the potential of association or coordination of activities in a certain form, in order for the whole to be stronger than the parts. Second, the partnership implies both the conceiving and the implementation of one or more strategies, project series or activities, despite the fact that the parts can be equally or differently involved within different stages of the projects.

The partnership implies the cooperation process, which supposes common behavior or activities. From the economic point of view, Sellgren (1990) defines the partnership as a plan that necessitates the implication or the financing by more entities. Bennet and Krebs (1994) also emphasize the common goals of the sides and define the partnership as the cooperation of various actors that are willing to cooperate, in order to reach common goals.

De Wilde and Pellon (2006) claim that “the strategic partnership between the European Union and the Russian Federation represents a real challenge from the perspective of common values”, which seems to suggest that common values are a needful element within the relations defined as strategic partnerships. In exchange, Danilov and De Spegeleire (1998) assume that “there is a recent devaluation of the strategic partnership concept” within the EU – Russia relations, getting support from Smith and Timmins (2003), which deny the existence of a real strategic partnership between

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Russia and the EU and affirm that a clearer terminology for defining this relation should be elaborated so that to call it an obvious partnership.

1. Literature review

At the base of strategic partnerships, we can find the use of an older concept in a new context, namely “strategic partner”. This expression has been firstly used within the EU in 1998, as a conclusion of the European Council, which reaffirmed “Russia’s importance as strategic partner of the Union”. Six months later, the European Council has adopted the common strategy for Russia, whose objective was to “deepen the strategic partnership between Russia and the European Union”, according to Article 12.3 of the Amsterdam Treaty, which stipulated that “the European Council will decide upon the common strategies to be implemented by the Union in the areas where member states have important common interests”.

However, the EU itself does not offer a certain definition of the “strategic partnership” concept, it only presents the results to be obtained through strategic partnerships. Due to them, the objective of the EU is to promote multilateralism in order to reach certain goals. More precisely, it wants “to find common points in common interest problems, to mutually support its political agendas and to act in common at a local or global level”.

Several researchers consider the lack of accuracy of the strategic partnership concept, as being a phenomenon that does not have a negative influence. Grevi (2008) claims that it can be an advantage, since a certain degree of flexibility and constructive ambiguity are necessary to such a concept. The lack of a uniform conceptual frame gives space to adjustments, concessions, compromises or common pragmatism and an elementary approach. In order to do so, the strategic feature of the EU partnerships with the emerging states allows the Union to follow its goals and set its rules at international level.

Contrary, Biscop and Renard (2009) criticize the fact that strategic partnerships were seen in various ways within the EU and internationally. According to them, the significant lack of accuracy leads to the overload of the use of the concept and to confusion both within the EU and internationally, which seems to be a negative phenomenon. The “strategic partnership” concept is flattering for all the entities involved – who wouldn’t want to be seen as a strategic and useful player?

Other authors are concerned about the fact that the “strategic partnership” notion leads to some expectations that are not fulfilled. Maihold (2010) studies the separate meaning of the two words. “Partnership” is a cultural ideal of a common relation. By simply choosing the term, the concept

includes assumptions regarding equal rights and duties and the possibility of constructive dialogue regarding the common development of the relation. Without this term, expectations regarding exclusivity emerge. The word “strategy” should not be individually used. Like the concept of “strategic alliance”, it is based on the cooperation of the economic agents agreeing upon certain objectives. Cooperation thus means common advantages and success.

Bendiek and Kramer (2011) also clarify the concept of “strategy” by giving it military and defense policies origins, like the choice of campaign strategies. This rises the standards of the European Union. From their point of view, strategy can be seen as “the well planned pursuit of a long term well clarified objective or as a planned fulfilment of a long term goal”, which has well defined goals, time intervals and action plans.

Authors such as Biscop or Renard (2009) claim that the role of the partnerships in the context of efficient multilateralism promoting remains unclear. From their point of view, strategic partnerships could be only used as means of promoting efficient multilateralism only if preceded by an evaluation of EU’s interests in each region, followed by the identification of common interests.

Alvaro de Vasconcelos *et al.* (2008) has attracted attention on the inherent tensions between multilateral objectives and the bilateral approach of strategic partnerships. To this extent, the objective of the EU is to understand the global common responsibility of different strategic actors on the global scene of peace and security. Thus, when defining partnerships with China, Russia or India, the multilateralism of the strategic partnerships has been more like a way to balance the forces than a global governing, which rises doubts on the principle of noninterference.

If partnerships really target efficient multilateralism, it determines the partners’ choosing. Thus, the EU designs strategic partnerships “with all that share our objective and values and are ready to act to their support”. Thus, strategic partnerships with other states show that rules are not definitive when it comes to choosing the partners. In the case of Russia, “common interests” are mentioned.

Biscop and Renard (2009) emphasize the fact that there are a few pre-established criteria when choosing the partners, beyond the common values and objectives sharing. Partners should be though capable of having some influence in global or regional problems.

Hussar *et al.* (2011) are concerned about the fact that the decision of choosing only global or regional powers in order to create partnerships will lead to the development of a circle of potential strategic partners that are significantly different when talking about values, the risk, interests, objectives and historical experience. When identifying potential partners, one should pursuit the convergence of interests, partners’ ability to design a successful foreign policy and locational advantage.

If choosing strategic partners sometimes seems as following different principles, we can say that it is the same as choosing the interest areas of the partnerships. Thus, it might concern terrorism, mass destruction weapons proliferation, regional conflicts and organized crime as the main global problems, and we may also add to the list internet and energy security, as well as climatic changes.

The Russian Federation and the European Union are strategic partners with a wide range of interdependencies regarding various fields, including economy, global and national security, but not the least, there is a common responsibility for the situation in Europe and the evolution outside the European continent. The main regulation instrument between the EU and Russia is represented by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement from June 24th 1994, aiming at the development of deep relations in politics, economy, trade, justice and population. At the 2003 Sankt Petersburg Summit, Russia and the EU have adopted a common strategic frame to create common spaces in four political fields – The Common Economic Space, the Common Space on Freedom, Security and Justice, the Common Space of External Security, Common Space of Research and Education, including cultural aspects. The implementation of these common spaces designed at the Summit in Moscow in 2005 represents the essential element of the deepening of the relations between the two sides.

At the London Summit in 2005, the Russian Federation and the European Union agreed on the necessity of renewing the existing legal frame, which failed in reaching the objectives of creating the four common spaces and reflecting the cooperation degree. In May 2006, the sides have made a political decision to elaborate a new document which was to introduce the strategic cooperation idea and to create efficient mechanisms to practically implement it. The negotiations have started in 2008 and they are still on.

Of course, the potential of the Russian Federation – European Union partnership can be exploited more. The main cooperation fields in the near future include the exemption or even elimination of visas for Russian or European citizens for short travels, the conceiving of a more efficient and result-oriented relation regarding politics and external security, including crisis administration, the harmonization of integration processes in Europe and Eurasia, the creation of mutual beneficial and sustainable conditions regarding the cooperation in the energy field. All these stages should lead to the strategic emergence of a common economic and human space, which is to unify the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.

The European Union is one of the strategic economic partners of the Russian Federation. The commercial and investment cooperation between the two sides used to evolve in a dynamic manner. Almost 50% of the Russian Federation external trading relations target the European Union. Russia is the third economic partner of the EU after the United States of America and China, being the main

oil and petrochemical products provider. Now, Russia and the EU actively cooperate to elaborate common approaches regarding the strategy and administration methods of the effects of the global economic crisis through bilateral dialogue, materialized in the form of the experts' collaboration of the governmental agencies and by maintaining close relations with the business environments in Russia and the EU, which offers great opportunities of taking part in the economic life and cooperation.

The EU – Russia partnership is mainly conceived on energy and resources. Russia represents a main actor whose contribution to the optimization of European energetic security cannot be ignored. The start of the first pipeline, North Stream, and speeding up the construction of the second one are amongst the main achievements in the field. There were also plans designed to create a common energy market for the Russian Federation and the member states of the EU. Despite the problems and difficulties between the two sides, the Russian Federation does not make a drama out of the situation and it is sure that there are mutual acceptable solutions based on the strategic feature of the partnership.

The relation between the EU and Russian is designed as a strategic partnership based on common interests and shared values upon which both sides agreed within several important international organizations such as UN, the Council of Europe or OSCE. The values the sides share are democracy, human rights, justice and market economy rules.

The EU – Russia partnership is deeper than their relations with other states. The bilateral dialogue frequency is unique. The necessity of developing such a partnership, both strategic and commercial, is easy to explain. The Russian Federation and the European Union are incredibly interrelated from the economic point of view. Russia is the third trading partner of the European Union after China and the United States (GD for External Relations from the European Commission). The main reason of the deepening is the EU's enlargement towards Eastern Europe, most of the Russian investments in the former soviet states being then included in statistics after the integration of the states in the European Union structures.

Russia surely sees itself as a global actor, which is significantly different compared to the other former soviet republics which want to join the European structures. The self-image of Russia show that the efforts to make it join the real democracy like the western countries and to modernize its economy, like the possible member states of the EU are not very useful since Russia does not respect any of the convergence criteria of the EU. Surely the EU cannot act in order to influence Russia's internal affairs and cannot get any certain promise from Kremlin regarding the future changes in the Russian political structure. Knowing this, Putin's Russia wants an EU which does not interfere in

Russia's internal affairs. In aspects such as political freedom, the rule of law and the power of justice or the conflicts in Chechnia or Ukraine, Russia wants the EU to abstain itself. From the economic perspective, Russia wants to increase the cooperation level with the EU, but after its rules.

Under Putin, Russia has diminished the economic domination of the oligarchs, their power being taken by the central authorities by creating state controlled gigantic companies. The centralization has become the main phenomenon of the Russian economic development and brought stability on the market by reducing the private business elites which had the power to impose themselves in front of Putin's authority. The Khodorkovsky case is a certain example. Now, Russia wants economic integration according to the European model which would be beneficial for the economic modernization by attracting investments and by tolerating the activities of the great state owned companies, such as Gazprom, which is allowed on the EU market.

Moreover, Russia desires a Europe which is more transparent when it comes to the design of common policies which involve the Russian Federation. The EU should allow Russia to get more involved in the European decision making process in aspects that influence Russian interests, such as trading policy, anti-dumping regulations and the certain impact of the increasing goods volume that Russia exports in the new member states of the Union.

The knowledge of the "partnership" concept were generated and codified using various methods, depending on the field, context, goal and audience. The concept differs as an explication, depending on the study object and the research field. The academic origins and the working experience of the authors influence their perspective on the partnership concept and the aspects they focus upon. Studies on the partnership include analytical studies that analyze the emergence and operation methods of partnerships, as well as information regarding the norms that promote partnerships and the way they should act.

Conclusions

Used for the first time in 1998 by the European Council, the "strategic partnership" concept supposes the strategies that the European Union would use to reach common objectives with certain states in various regions of the world, which would support its political agenda and promote global or local cooperation. The lack of a uniform conceptual frame offers researcher the chance to adjust, make concessions, compromises or apply common pragmatism and an elementary approach. The significant lack of accuracy leads to the overload of the use of the concept and to confusion both within the EU and at an international level, which seems to be a negative phenomenon. The "strategic

partnership” concept is flattering for all the entities involved, as each state in the world wishes to be seen as a trustful partner.

“Partnership” is a cultural ideal of a common relation. The concept includes assumptions regarding equal rights and duties and the possibility of constructive dialogue regarding the common development of the relation. Without this term, expectations regarding exclusivity emerge. The word “strategy” should not be individually used. The objective of the EU is to understand the global common responsibility of different strategic actors on the global scene of peace and security. The EU designs strategic partnerships “with all that share our objective and values and are ready to act to their support”. Thus, strategic partnerships with other states show that rules are not definitive when it comes to choosing the partners. In the case of Russia, “common interests” are mentioned.

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