

Saint-Petersburg 2017

Research Brief No 42

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«Normative power» issue in studies of EU-Russian Relations:

Studies in English

The specifics of the European Union (and its predecessor, the European Communities) attracted the attention from the very inception of the European integration. As a result in the 1970s the concept of "civilian power" emerged, meaning an actor, who does not have all the attributes of the state (especially military power) but at the same time has a serious impact on international relations and on its partners. A little later, J. Nye classified the European Communities as a soft power, that is an actor who uses economic cooperation, humanitarian aid, etc to achieve their goals in the world. I. Manners, the author of the concept "normative power Europe" (NPE, "Europe" mostly meaning the European Union), noted that the quintessence of the influence of the European Union is not so much soft as it was previously understood but in its worldview, in its ability to determine "what is normal" and to provide normative justifications. The concept of NPE deals with how the EU enters values' competition, and how it affects its position in the world. This type of influence is long-term.

Since its inception, the concept of NPE has generated a lot of theoretical disputes. Some dwelled on how important it was for the EU's external activities (vs. identity building). Others reflected on its normative components and instruments. Yet another strand of research in non-Russian literature concentrated on whether the EU is consistent with NPE logic and whether it has the right to dictate its norms. Finally, the importance of external perception of the EU as a normative leadership was investigated. It is in this last block that the problems of EU relations with Russia

(and also many other external partners) are often touched upon. In other words, other groups of studies is not interested in bilateral relations as such but rather use EU-Russian relations as a testing arena for various assumptions.

In particular, the researchers analyzed how the NPE is perceived in Russia, compared with similar parameters in China, India. Another variant of the approach to this problem was the analysis of the alternatives proposed to the ENP. Finally, it was closely analyzed how the presence of Russia as a meaningful other helps the EU to constitute itself.

Relations between Russia and the European Union were also often used to identify the ways in which the EU's normative leadership in the world was challenged. In particular, three approaches that Russia uses could be singled out. The first one is the identification of cases where the EU has made interests a priority, not norms, or used norms to promote commercial and geopolitical interests, and has created norms based on interests. This group also includes cases when the interests of member countries clearly contradicted the EU's normative leadership. The second one raised the question of whether the EU itself corresponds to the normative logic. The problems of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic countries were analysed in this respect as well as Russian reports on the respect for human rights in the EU. Finally, the third approach consisted of challenging the universality of norms.

Another large group of foreign studies on normative power in the relations between Russia and the EU used the concept to order empirical realities. Researchers previously on various occasions explained that Russia can not be integrated into the European Union, that there are two different Europes, and that Russia and the EU often interpret basic values in different ways, which leaves no room for a uniform implementation. This has become a solid basis for debates about why the NPE thesis does not work in the relations between Moscow and Brussels (as opposed to the latter's dialogue with the candidate countries, southern and eastern neighbours or developing countries).

The thesis about the contradictions between values / norms (as the starting point of EU policy) and the interests (on which Russia was based) became a convenient and even banal scheme for explaining multiple contradictions between Russia and the EU. It was widely replicated, served to classify empirical material. Authors often ignored that they apply different methodologies to the EU and Russia (constructivism and realism respectively), do not pay attention to the fact that interests can not be isolated from values and vice versa. At the same time, most of these studies frequently ended with a thesis on the moral victory of the EU, or with the conclusion that Russia won some tactical victories, but at the cost of a strategic defeat (irreparable damage to long-term cooperation between Russia and the EU).

The works of Russian researchers, explaining the specifics of the Russian vision, the parameters of its value orientation, although they were present in English versions, did not exert much influence. They also did little to change the binary nature of the discussion about values and interests.