

Saint-Petersburg 2016

Research Brief No 2

Tatiana Romanova

EU-Russian Economic Relations in Russian-Language Scholarship

Economic cooperation between Russia and the European Economic Community (EEC), and then the European Union (EU) has always been the focus of domestic researchers. Here, modern research is an excellent "successor" of the Soviet research. In addition, other characteristic features of the Soviet research played the role, such as the emphasis on economics as determining all other spheres of life, as well as the concentration on applied aspects, on empiricism (including statistical data), and their investigation and interpretation. In the Russian studies of the relations between Russia and the EU, the study of economic relations is still vividly expressed. As a rule, the emphasis is also on empiricism, not on theoretical comprehension or testing of any models.

Firstly, most domestic work addresses the problems of trade, the dynamics of trade turnover growth and their reasons (including rising energy prices, the restoration of the Russian economy with a logical increase in the purchasing power of the population and the demand for European goods). In addition, the focus was on two disparities in trade relations between Russia and the European Union. The first is that about 50% of Russia's trade turnover falls on the EU, whereas for Brussels, our country is only the third or fourth most important economic partner (about 10% of turnover), i.e. for Russia, the EU as a trading partner is more important than for the EU Russia. The second disproportion is that Moscow exports mainly natural resources (more than 70%), but imports ready-made high-tech goods, i.e. the structure of trade is of a colonial nature. In addition, the relatively low importance of trade in services in the relations between Russia and the EU has traditionally been noted.

Since the beginning of this century, attention has also been drawn to investment between countries. The dynamics of flows, their distribution in the countries of the European Union, and also by sectors were analyzed. There were significant differences in the statistics of Russia and the European Union, related both to methodological aspects and to the essential (the origin of capital and its movement). Finally, it was analyzed how the investment expansion that has begun in Russia influences the image of Russia in the world.

Negotiations on the formation of the Common Economic Space of Russia and the European Union served as an impetus for the conceptual interpretation of economic relations. In particular the notion of the space was critically examined and possibilities of applying Swiss, Norwegian and other models were examined. The results of the construction of the spaces were also critically analyzed, the demands of Brussels were assessed, the options for incorporating EU norms in Russia were discussed. Over time, the critical attitude of domestic authors has increased, the European Union was reproached for its imperial approach as well as for its demands to abandon the rigid unilateral imposition of its norms. Thus, purely economic empirical studies were gradually replaced by political science, more often in the spirit of a realistic approach, a clash of interests and a zero-sum game.

Against this background, attempts were made to comprehend the experience and prospects of technological cooperation between Russia and the EU, as well as to analyze the prospects for modernization cooperation. It is noteworthy that in the latter case, political conceptualization also prevailed, which, obviously, was due to the special nature of the Partnership, understood differently in Russia and the EU (in the first case as an exclusively economic process, and in the second as political as well).

Many fundamental questions (the influence of the WTO, the formation of Eurasian integration and the interaction of the two economic regimes) for a long time did not receive much interpretation. They, rather, were mentioned casually, but did not become the object of any study.

The introduction of EU sanctions against Russia and Moscow's response boosted related studies. For the most part, they were also descriptive and empirical, with little reference to the concepts that have emerged from the study of sanctions since the 1970s. Many focused on Russia's ability to substitute import and, consequently, to minimize ties with the EU.

Finally, domestic study of economic relations also paid close attention to EU technical assistance program (mainly TACIS), its parameters, priorities, and the impact on the transformation in Russia, including in the economic field. Most often, however, Russian works were limited to describing priorities, as well as translating official EU reports.