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Institutionalism in the study of EU-Russian relations:

Studies in Russian

Institutionalism in Russian repeated the way, traditional for all theories and methodologies, with the possible exception of realism (neo-realism and neoclassical realism). On the one hand, institutional approaches have been actively used to analyse European integration, its internal processes. For the most part, this was a retelling of works written in the West. Three institutional themes attracted particular attention of studies in Russian. The first is the change of the institutions of the European Union under the influence of various reforms of its constituent documents (the Nice Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty). The second is flexible integration. The third is the process of decision-making and especially lobbying as a legitimate influence primarily from the business side.

Descriptiveness and rationalism are characteristic of all these works, despite the fact that they relied on Western methodology for the analysis of internal processes in the EU. Both aspects are connected with the nature of development of the modern domestic IR studies as well as studies of European integration and relations between Russia and the EU. In most cases, classical institutionalism comes from legal research and is characterised by a description of the basic functions of institutions and a formal decision-making process. At the same time, little is being said about how institutions change on a daily basis, only grand historical changes are tracked. Moreover, the term "institution" is treated extremely narrowly.

Neoinstitutionalism, describing institutions as a “relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals” (D. March and D. Olsen), was hardly taken into account in Russian-language studies. At best rational (rational choice) neoinstitutionalism was used, which is not accidental. It is the most established in Russia thanks primarily to economic (rather than political) research. Despite the fact that changes in institutions were often analysed, historical neoinstitutionalism was rarely used. Sociological and discursive neoinstitutionalism can not be traced, which is due, on the whole, to the low interest of Russian-language studies to constructivism.

The analysis of relations between Russia and the European Union in the institutional framework in the Russian science is rare. Mostly, these were works of lawyers, written in the spirit of classical institutionalism. In general works on European law the specifics of legal cooperation between Russia and the European Union was examined. Relevant chapters referred to the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), and analysed its institutional provisions with varying degrees of detail. Sometimes the system of agreements that arose on the basis of the PCA, the legal nature and importance of the roadmaps for the four spaces was also considered. Particular attention was paid to the economic aspects of cooperation in the EU, as well as to the problem of delineation of competencies and spheres of competence of the European Union and its member countries. In particular, the mixed character of the PCA was emphasized, i.e. that it affects the competence of both the EU and its member countries.

Political scientists only briefly covered institutional aspects. However, such EU-Russian institutions as cooperation (in various spheres), partnership, legal rapprochement, dialogue, modernisation were examined without much referral to neoinstitutional studies. There have also been attempts to institutionalize the future relationship between Russia and the EU, as well as examine how it could affect the Russian domestic institutions. For some time, the topic of lobbying EU institutions, how Russian business could build cooperation with the European Union, bypassing the state channels of Russia, was quite popular too. Recently, transnational and transgovernmental levels of relations between Russia and the EU have also been analysed through the prism of historical neo-institutionalism. In particular, they studied how they contributed to some rudimentary political and legal harmonisation. In addition, researchers wondered why established institutions, contrary to neoinstitutional logic, did not prevent the deterioration of relations between Russia and the EU.

However, theoretically grounded works that apply neoinstitutionalism for the analysis of relations between Russia and the EU remain rare in Russian. For the most part, neo-

institutionalism serves in the Russian-language literature only to systematize and generalize the empirical material, and not to investigate theoretical and methodological positions of neo-institutionalism or make forecasts.