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EU enlargement to the East and Russia-EU relations in the studies in Russia

After the collapse of communist regimes in the states of the East-Central Europe in 1989, these countries were invited to join the Western institutions, including the European Union.

Eastern enlargement of the European Union has become the largest in the history of EU enlargements. It took place in two stages: in 2004, eight countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia) joined the European Union together with two Mediterranean countries (Cyprus and Malta); in 2007 Romania and Bulgaria became the members of the EU. Currently, the EU enlargement agenda includes the post-socialist countries of the Western Balkans, most of them belonged to the former Yugoslavia before 1990s. By now among these countries only Croatia joined the European Union in 2013. Also, Turkey is a candidate for the EU membership, yet now its prospects for the EU accession are hardly feasible.

The enlargement of the EU to the East had significant consequences for Russia and Russia-EU relations mainly because of two reasons. First factor refers to the fact the Eastern enlargement was the biggest one in the history of the EU. Secondly, most of the countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 are located between Russia and the "old" members of the Union, until the end of the Cold War they had belonged to the "Soviet sphere of influence". Because of that these countries had uneasy historical and political relations with Russia, yet on the other hand, the economic and trade relations between Russia and new EU member-states had been quite developed by the time of enlargement. It is important to note that due to the eastern enlargement of the EU its share in the Russia's foreign trade reached 50% and even exceeded this figure, which became an important economic and socio-psychological factor for Russia.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the process of EU enlargement to the East has attracted interests of the Russian academic community. In the end of 1990s the number of studies devoted to the problems and prospects of the EU enlargement began to increase culminating in the first half of 2000s.

The most of the studies published in Russia have focused on the implications of the EU enlargement for Russia-EU relations and for the future development of the EU. In particular, the multiple aspects of the new EU member-states participation in the EU have been discussed including such issues as their influence on the EU policies towards Russia and, vice versa, the EU institutions and law influence on the its new members. Thus, a number of studies have been devoted to the analysis of the political, economic and social situation in the particular enlargement countries as well their foreign policy in the context of their accession to the EU and other Western institutions, also the changes of the economic and trade regimes between Russia and new EU member-states have been explored. A good number of the academic literature have been devoted to the bilateral relations between Russia and the individual new EU member-states in the context of the EU enlargement. The studies on the bilateral relations between Russia and new EU members continued to be regularly published after the enlargement of the European Union. As well because of enlargement the issue of the Kaliningrad region has been intensively debated.

Also, some studies have analyzed the medium and long-term influence of the EU eastern enlargement on the EU institutions and policies. In general, most researchers supposed that the enlargement of the EU (as well as the simultaneous processes of the deepening of the European integration) would support the EU transformation from the economic and trade bloc into the international institution with more political capacities and functions.

The EU enlargement to the Western Balkans and the enlargement negotiations between EU and Turkey have receive less interests by the Russian academic community than the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007. Most of the studies on these issues are devoted to the policies and political debates in the leading EU countries on its current enlargement policies. Also, some studies have analyzed the bilateral relations between the individual current EU candidate and potential candidate countries with the EU and Russia.