

Russia Can't Work With European Parliament

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February 23, 2014

The  **Moscow Times**

The European Parliament plays a special role among European Union institutions, translating their positions into practice and addressing highly sensitive international issues. Unfortunately, this role also includes the function of formulating the EU's Russophobic stance and issuing entirely subjective assessments of Russia's domestic and foreign policy. Those evaluations harm the strategic partnership between Moscow and Brussels, which turns 20 this year, and the Russophobia has become both a tool and an ideology for many Western agencies.

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As proof, consider the output of the European Parliament in recent years: resolutions concerning the Magnitsky case, Russia's human rights record, judicial system and law enforcements agencies, as well as Moscow's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent. These clearly indicate a willingness to halt progress on important issues such as visas, energy and the environment, which were achieved at the Russia-EU summit in January.

It seems that no sooner had both sides agreed to cooperate and even hold a news conference with President Vladimir Putin, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, than a new outburst of Russophobia struck. A few days later, the European Parliament passed heavy-handed resolutions accusing Russia of interfering in Ukrainian affairs and of conducting a dictatorial policy with other former Soviet republics.

How should Moscow respond to such actions? An emotional retort would serve no useful purpose. Instead, a rational analysis of the situation is needed.

1. These resolutions intentionally divert the public's attention away from intractable problems such as unemployment, interethnic conflict and gender inequality, to name but a few, and toward a threatening foreign enemy. This tactic of vilifying Russia has been long in the making and will continue long into the future.

Many political forces in the EU deeply resent Russia's positive approach to Ukraine. Moscow has encouraged Kiev to establish a constitutionally based dialogue with the opposition and extended vitally needed financial assistance to Ukraine's economy.

2. These resolutions were drafted amid a veritable bacchanalia of interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine — a full-fledged member of the United Nations — and in violation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on diplomatic law. The actors in this disturbing drama include not only EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, European Parliament Vice President Jacek Protasiewicz and the EU's Cox-Kwasniewski mission to Ukraine, but also members of the U.S. State Department and Senate. In order to disguise this ugly fact — one that has rightfully caused the indignation of the international community — European policymakers have once again directed baseless criticisms at Russia's behavior.

3. The resolutions will generate more votes for the European Parliament deputies running for re-election in May. Judging from a number of factors and circumstances, it looks like the next European Parliament will, unfortunately, also resort to Russophobic rhetoric. If the EU and Russia would only join forces, they could help move the world order toward respect for justice and the law and address geopolitical issues in cooperation with other states.

Unfortunately, the fact that the next European Parliament will probably not include a single person advocating a pragmatic and respectful dialogue with Moscow means that there is little chance of establishing meaningful interparliamentary cooperation. In effect, the EU-Russia

Parliamentary Cooperation Committee has yet to find common ground on which to build a viable working relationship. The Russian side will look for patriotic and highly professional individuals to represent its interests.

4. We can see how, in recent weeks, this anti-Russian sentiment has brought a number of European organizations closer together over Ukraine's future. The evidence is in the way European deputies and politicians have coordinated their actions with the European Council, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and others. They take their signals directly from Brussels, which, in turn, coordinates its position with Washington. A good example is the PACE resolution adopted at the 65th session in Strasbourg in January. Biased, unjust and Russophobic, it was passed by a technical majority that included representatives of EU member states.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that Russian diplomacy faces a daunting task. We must learn to speak with our counterparts in the language of facts and rely on history, sociology and culture to defend the norms and principles of international law.

Our partners, in turn, must behave responsibly and in the interests of a stable world order. They should not only come to this categorical imperative through dialogue and "soft power," but also in a consistent and principled manner.

Common sense arguments and appeals to the law that the Russian delegation and others have voiced have so far failed to convince our listeners.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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