



EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY AT
SAINT-PETERSBURG

Russia's Infrastructural Preoccupation:

Lessons for Europe

Oleg Kharkhordin
EUSP Rector

New features of Russia-EU relations

I will be speaking not as an expert on EU affairs, but rather as a humble practitioner – who helped Russia join one pan-European institution, the EUI.

Civil society level: last year Russia was represented at a similar conference by a deputy minister of foreign affairs.

My questions: what novel features of the world can be seen in a recent Russian experience?

Why does it matter for EU ?



Usual assumptions



RUSSIA is a part of BRICS; but no integration ambitions so far there,
a multilateral venue for discussions on global affairs,
a G8-like summit for emerging economies

RUSSIA – EU: traditionally, no integration ambitions whatsoever.
Stumbling cooperation during recent years, but no strategic partnership yet.
And many problems still remain unsolved



A Really new event?: the Eurasian Union



The Treaty on the Common Economic Space between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan came into force on January 1, 2012.

The creation of the Eurasian Union is on the agenda, allegedly copying such EU institutions as the Commission, with its structure & functions, etc.

What stands behind the idea?

Geopolitical nostalgia, vested interests of industrial lobbies, or aspirations of a successful transfer of the EU-model to Eurasia?

Previous attempts (Customs Union) did not work because of Russia joining WTO



A Really new event?: the Eurasian Union



This Eurasian temptation is linked to a **common infrastructure**. When one sticks an electricity plug into a wall socket in Minsk or Kiev, one is linked to Vladivostok

The problem of infrastructure is central to post-Soviet concerns: 20 years of insufficient repairs and maintenance → constant concern of decision-makers of all levels.

How does one define Russia? Where does it end? Russian identity is being rebuilt now, though, not around common electrical networks of the country, but rather around new **skeletons of identity** – gas and oil pipelines.



The Centrality of Infrastructure

BRICS: hazy identity because of the lack of common infrastructure and institutions

EU: common institutions, but almost no common infrastructure

Russia: politics of infrastructure – offering cash flows to East European neighbors in exchange for their ceding ownership of their key infrastructural assets.

EU's Eastern Partnership was not offering sizable cash benefits or infrastructural unification



Positive Developments

But the security risks of the Eurasian Union should not be overestimated. Russia is increasingly interested in improving its relations with the EU for its own economic prosperity, technical assistance and security matters.

Russia is the 3-rd biggest trade partner of the EU, and Russia's accession to the WTO drags Russia under the global rules-based system, which benefits EU exporters.

The EU might expect more political diversity in Russia, given that the winter protests significantly shattered the old political model of Russia



Sociology of things: Lessons for EU

One: one should take infrastructure seriously.

Russia is constantly concerned with it because of its woes. But it is central to identity-building, and EU can concern itself with it while it is in a far better situation

Two: Cooperate with Russia on the issue of infrastructure. And not at the state level, but rather at lower levels, even sub-regional and municipal ones.

A common European heritage (Skinner and van Gelderen): republican tradition and self-governing communities



Summing up: Wider Europe?

New initiatives in institution-building, linked to infrastructure
Contacts in **participatory budgeting** at city level, for example.
More than 250 cities in Europe are doing this, Russia is starting as well



Why it is important: all struggles for freedom in Russia have moved now to the municipal level. Mayoral elections in Yaroslavl', Astrakhan, Omsk



Human dimension

People (civil society, students, universities, etc.) offer another dimension of cooperation. That's why I am here – we are building a different civic infrastructure of Europe and its immediate vicinity

