

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DELEGATION TO THE EU-RUSSIA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

INFORMATION NOTE ON THE

WORK OF THE DELEGATION TO THE EU-RUSSIA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

(2004-2009)

DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR
EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION

23 July 2009
EUR/SP/CS/EK

I. SUMMARY BACKGROUND

Introduction

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federal Assembly has been consolidated during the last few years, reflecting a more active and constructive policy approach from which both sides have drawn advantage. In spite of political and economic turbulence inside Russia during the nineties it is quite apparent that the Russian political authorities are attaching an increasing importance to their relations with the EU. They established for example a post of Deputy Prime-Minister to co-ordinate EU-Russia relations and created a permanent secretariat to manage the relationship at governmental level and assist with interministerial coordination, they also appointed the Ambassador to the EU with rank of Minister and permanent member of the Federal Government. They finally agreed to intensify political dialogue with the three EU institutions in the spirit of the provisions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which was ratified and which came into effect on December 1st 1997, and strengthened the cooperation further at the 2003 St. Petersburg summit by creating a Permanent Cooperation Council that will cooperate on Ministerial level.

The EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007 brought the two sides even closer and increased their interdependence, as well as highlighted the further need to step up cooperation in all areas. With the increasing attention attached to the European Neighbourhood Policy and its strengthening, such issues as economic cooperation and mutual facilitation of business relations, energy supply and its security, international security and the situation in the common neighbourhood, human rights, movement facilitation and promotion of people-to-people contacts, have acquired particular importance in the present EU-Russia relations. Moreover, with the expiration of the PCA in 2007, the future prospects of deeper cooperation under a possible new framework agreement constitute the central issue of discussion between the sides.

It is an indication of the strength of parliamentary involvement in this process that on the day of the PCA entry into force the European Parliament was able to host the first meeting of the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC), created under the terms of Article 95 of this agreement. This committee has specific rights and responsibilities, which are set out in the agreement - notably the right to receive information from and make recommendations to the Cooperation Council. Compared to the former interparliamentary meetings therefore, its role and function is enhanced. Following the 2003 State Duma elections the newly established delegation of the Russian Federal Assembly to the EU-Russia PCC declared its willingness to further strengthen the role of the PCCs, as well as did the Members of the European Parliament in the new 2004-2009 legislative period.

The significance of the PCC is fully recognised by the Russian authorities and cooperation between the European Parliament, the Russian Federal Assembly (i.e. the State Duma and the Council of the Federation) and the Russian Government is both open and regular. Typically, visits by members of the European Parliament delegation to Moscow would include meetings with Russian Parliamentarians; Ministerial meetings and in particular the Foreign Minister responsible for relations with the EU, other meetings with prominent political personalities such as party leaders, and meetings with representatives of significant institutions such as the Central Bank. The European Parliament, for its part, regularly receives visits from the Russian government and other institutions in addition to hosting the formal meetings of the PCC.

Contacts between the European Parliament and the Commission and Council are also close as far as EU - Russia relations are concerned. Apart from the normal interinstitutional dialogue in Brussels and Strasbourg, the Commission Delegation and the Member States representatives in Moscow actively contribute to these activities. In this way there is a steady flow of information between institutions.

A strategic partnership

Both because of its history and because of its current strategic importance as a key actor on the world stage, Russia has been a focal point of EU attention. Indeed, relations with the Russian Federation remain a foreign and security policy priority for the EU. The fact that the first "*Common Strategy*" adopted by the EU following the implementation of the Treaty of Amsterdam concerned Russia confirms this. The "*Common Strategy*" provided the parameters of the EU's foreign policy towards Russia, was the first of its type and innovated in providing an inter-pillar policy and coherence with the bilateral programmes of EU Member-States. It therefore represented a considerable step forward in creating a coherent European foreign policy.

Though the Strategy was not extended beyond June 2004, the concept of a "genuine strategic partnership" with Russia has been further developed. At the St Petersburg Summit in May 2003, the EU and Russia agreed thus to strengthen their cooperation by creating in the long-term *four* "*Common spaces*" in the framework of the PCA: a common economic space; a common space of freedom, security and justice; a common space on external security cooperation; and a common space on research, education, and culture. The spaces defined the future agenda of the EU-Russia cooperation, while their implementation through the adoption of a single package of Road Maps was decided at the 2005 Summits.

The Common Economic Space aims at the creation of an open and integrated market between the EU and Russia by achieving transparency and non-discrimination, as well as by mutually reducing barriers to trade and investment. Russia's accession to the WTO is expected to particularly encourage the process. A latest achievement in this field was the decision to phase out the charges for over-flying Siberia, taken at the Helsinki Summit in November 2006. In the context of recent international developments, the cooperation on energy and its supply security, based on the principles of the Energy Charter, is a central issue of discussion.

The Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice was particularly marked in 2006 by the conclusion of Visa facilitation and Readmission Agreements between the EU and Russia. Among other spheres of cooperation, border management and the reform of the Russian judiciary, as well as human rights respect and fight against terrorism, smuggling and money laundering are also very important priorities.

As for the Common Space on External Security, it presupposes cooperation in order to promote international peace and stability. Particular attention is attached to the settlement of "frozen conflicts" in the area of the common neighbourhood.

Finally, the Common Space on Research, Education and Culture is oriented towards strengthening cooperation and promoting joint projects and exchange in the above-mentioned fields. The creation of a European Research Area, as well as further implementation of the European programmes TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus, is among the main priorities.

Beyond the four common spaces, recent cooperation between the EU and Russia also focused on the development of the “Northern Dimension” under its new framework, as well as on the one of the Kaliningrad Region as a pilot project.

The European Parliament recognised implicitly the importance of a strategic partnership when it agreed to a sixteen-member delegation for relations with Russia for the previous legislative period, chaired by Mrs Constanze KREHL (PSE, Germany) since 1994, which became a 25-member delegation in 1999; on a par only with the delegation for relations with the United States. After the recent enlargements, the delegation is at present composed of 32 members and 25 substitutes, thus gathering 57 members of the European Parliament. The delegation held fifty seven meetings between 1997 and 2004 (the largest number for any delegation) reflecting the fact that this period has been particularly rich as far as events in Russia were concerned. Since September 2004, 23 meetings have already been organized in the form of PCC, working groups, PCC Bureau, and preparatory meetings.

Through the EU-Russia PCC and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the European Parliament is regularly informed and involved with the implementation of the common spaces and the other opportunities of partnership development. It also influences itself the process and contributes to it through the adoption of resolutions and recommendations. In the present legislative period, the European Parliament has adopted eleven resolutions on Russia, which proves the fact that the institution has closely followed and expressed itself on the situation in Russia, as well as influenced the way of developments in the relations of this country with the EU. A significant indicator of this attention consists in the seven resolutions adopted on Russia in 2006 and early 2007. Beyond the last two legislative resolutions adopted in 2007 on the approval of the EU-Russia short-stay visa and readmission agreements, the five resolutions passed in 2006 addressed such important issues as the murder of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, the situation in Chechnya and the civil society in Russia, Russia’s relations with China, the results of the EU-Russia Summits held in 2006.

II. THE WORK OF THE DELEGATION

Overview

Members of the Delegation met during the previous and present legislative periods almost every month in the course of the Strasbourg session or in Brussels in order to discuss developments in Russia and, where necessary, to prepare meetings of the PCC. On such occasions, members may be briefed by the European Commission - from time to time by the Commissioner himself, or by other specialists. They may discuss the implementation of the EU's TACIS and other assistance programmes with senior officials from the Commission, as well as the implementation of the specific objectives of the PCA and the future legal basis of cooperation between the sides. The contribution of the delegation in this respect, as well as in the preparation of debates and resolutions concerning the EU-Russia relations, is important.

With regard to the TACIS programme, the delegation has already made a number of things clear. It has insisted that much greater emphasis be placed on the sustainability of projects, which should involve a more significant local resource element. Projects have too often been top heavy with European consultants, making little use of local expertise. Pilot projects have rarely been reproduced elsewhere in Russia, in spite of their immediate and successful local impact. It has been particularly critical also of the excessive internal delays within the Commission decision-making process and called for a simplification of the rules and procedures to make them more efficient.

There should be no reason for delays of six months or more in project authorisation and implementation when some other organisations can decide such issues in well under one month.

Since 1991, 2.6 billion Euros have been allocated under the TACIS programme for the implementation of more than 1,500 projects in the Russian Federation. When visiting Russia, the Delegation usually tries to visit TACIS projects and discuss their implementation with the local authorities, relevant Commission officials and with those working or otherwise involved in the projects. In the past years projects have been visited, discussed and assessed in the Moscow region, Samara region, Irkutsk, Ulan Ude, St. Petersburg, the Kaliningrad region, North-West Russia (Murmansk) and North-West Siberia. The reports of these missions are available to members. With the expiration of the previous TACIS regulation at the end of 2006, the Delegation will also certainly address the issue of the new TACIS concept and of the new assistance instruments, as well as their coherence.

The Delegation has also provided the core element of the election observer missions, which the European Parliament authorised for the State Duma elections in December 1995, and the presidential elections in June/July 1996 and the parliamentary elections in December 1999.

It is when the European Parliament delegation for cooperation with Russia meets with its Russian counterparts from the State Duma and the Council of the Federation (collectively called the Federal Assembly) that the EU-Russia PCC formally meets. The meetings are jointly chaired by the Presidents of the two delegations. On behalf of the European Parliament, Mr Camiel EURLINGS has been co-chairing the PCC since 2004, and was preceded by Mrs Constanze KREHL between 1997 and 2002, and Mr Bart STAES between 2002 and 2004. While Mr Oleg MOROZOV has been the Russian Co-Chair since 2003 Duma elections, the previous presidents on the Russian side were Mr Vladimir RYZHKOV between 1994 and 1999, and Mr Vladimir LUKIN, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma between 2000 and 2003. The rules of procedure stipulate that the PCC meets twice a year, once in Russia and once in either Strasbourg or Brussels.

In practice, the European side of the PCC has actually visited Russia twice a year, each time with half its members; forming a "Working Group". This is a more practical and efficient form of cooperation, making visits logistically easier to organise, while remaining within the overall budget allocated for such meetings. It also makes more sense politically at a time when Russia is experiencing rapid change. The Parliament is thus able to be more present in Russia, gaining knowledge and understanding while at the same time profiling the role of the European Parliament in relation to the Russian federal political establishment and the media. More frequent contacts also generate more interest and provide continuity to the political dialogue.

Correspondingly when the Russian members visit Europe, the meeting, which takes place over at least two days, tends to take on the form of a larger plenary session. Invitations are extended to the President in Office of the Council, and to the Commissioner responsible, to address the meeting. It is from such meetings that the PCC is able to fulfil its responsibilities under the PCA and make *Recommendations* to the Council. It has so far done this on several occasions; the first recommendation concerned the recognition of Russia as a Market Economy (a major political objective of President Yeltsin); the second concerned the promotion of legislation and the implementation of international agreements on intellectual property, including the fight against record piracy. Frequent discussions were held on the issue of Russian membership of the WTO, mutual access to markets and encouraging investments. The EU actively encouraged the authorities of the Russian Federation to take the necessary steps for WTO membership. Energy and its secure

supply has also become a central issue in the latest exchanges of view, while the dialogue on human rights has been continued.

The Delegation's activity also led the sides to become involved in the question of the deliveries of EU food aid to Russia. The first deliveries arrived in March 1999. Although designed to reduce the effect of food shortages on the Russian population, while providing through the use of counterpart funds a significant contribution to the payment of overdue pensions, the operation always appeared more designed to shift EU food surpluses. On a similar note, the Delegation was critical of the fact that the Commission failed to respond to the appeals from the Russian Red Cross for aid to the most vulnerable sectors of the population that in certain identified areas lack even minimum medical facilities and medicinal supplies. This is an issue that has been followed up very closely.

Other issues covered in the course of interparliamentary discussions with our Russian colleagues included the effect of EU enlargement on EU-Russia relations, the development of the Kaliningrad region as a pilot project in our relations, the new European security architecture, relations with the countries of the common neighbourhood, fostering people-to-people contacts, and other questions related to human rights and religious freedom (in the context of the Russian legislation on this matter), nuclear safety, environment.

The meetings of the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC)

In the course of the last legislative period the EU-Russia PCC held its *5th meeting* in Brussels on the 25-26 November 2002 and discussed the state and prospects for EU-Russia Co-operation within the framework of the PCA. The issues concerning security, the fight against terrorism, the situation in Chechnya, political and economical developments in the Federation, the EU-Russia energy dialogue, the transit between the Kaliningrad region and the rest of the Russian Federation, the Northern Dimension and the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme were all on the agenda. The Committee condemned all act of terrorism, underlined its support for human rights respect, the rule of law and democratic principles. The Members also agreed that a Facilitated Travel and Visa regime should be applied to Russian citizens travelling between the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad Oblast and the rest of the Russian Federation after the 1 July 2003. The Russian delegation supported the final objective of visa-free movement and agreed that Facilitated Travel will be applied after the 1 July 2003. The PCC members stressed the importance of the strategic partnership between the EU and the Russian Federation, and were satisfied that the Council of the EU recognised the Federation as a market economy. The importance of effective Cross-Border cooperation, the Northern Dimension in the EU-Russia relations and the need of close coordination between TACIS cooperation and the cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Council of the Baltic States were recognised. Russia's economic efforts and steps to remove barriers to trade and investments were also welcomed.

The *6th PCC* was held in Strasbourg during the September plenary session on the 24-25 September 2003. The Committee discussed political and economical developments in the Russian Federation and the EU, the results of the EU-Russia summit in May 2003 in St Petersburg, strengthening of the PCA, the proposal for the European Constitution, the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the implementation of the Facilitated Transit Regime between the Kaliningrad region and the rest of the Russian Federation. Following the St. Petersburg EU-Russia summit (May 2003) the Members discussed the creation of the four common spaces in economy, education, home affairs and security, and took note of the successful implementation of the Facilitated Transit Regime for Russian citizens. The Committee also underlined the necessity of focusing on Russia's joining the WTO, and of new efforts to make the process of ratification of the Kyoto Protocol possible. Finally, the EU Draft Constitution was examined.

Within the present legislative period, the Committee convened three times. The *7th meeting* of the EU-Russia PCC took place in Brussels on the 22 and 23 November 2004. While examining in details the evolution of the EU-Russia relations, the PCA and the creation of the four common spaces, it considerably focused on cooperation in combating international terrorism and EU assistance in the North Caucasus. The Committee also addressed the following issues: the need for ratification by the Russian National Assembly of the Kyoto protocol; the social and economic development of the Kaliningrad region; the situation of the Russian speaking people in the member states of the EU and the still not finalised border agreements between some of them and the Russian Federation.

The *8th PCC* was held in Brussels, on the 25 and 26 January 2006. It discussed in particular the human rights situation in the Russian Federation and the EU and the need for continued dialogue in the field. With the presentation of Mr Murat Zyazikov, President of the Republic of Ingushetia and of the Humanitarian Aid for Refugees in Ingushetia, the situation in the North Caucasus and the hope for a credible peace in the region, as well as EU-funded assistance in the field were also examined in detail. The PCC also discussed the significant steps taken by the Russian Federation towards accessing the WTO, as well as underlined the importance of the approximation of competition legislation and of making further progress in the implementation of the Road Maps towards the four Common Spaces. With relation to the EU-Russia cross-border cooperation, the PCC took note of the conclusions and recommendations of its Working Groups with regard to the efficient functioning of the EU-Russian borders in general and of the Kaliningrad Oblast border in particular. As a result it recommended to have a study elaborated on the different proposals and their feasibility for the social, economic and regional development of the Kaliningrad Oblast as a pilot project in the framework of the EU-Russian relations.

The *9th meeting of the PCC* took place in Brussels, on the 22-23 November 2006. Special attention in the course of the discussion was paid to the elaboration of a new basic agreement between Russia and the EU that will replace the PCA expiring in 2007. An agreement was reached that the new document must be compact, and must contain the necessary guidelines and instruments for intensified cooperation for the next decade.

With the examination of three studies on Kaliningrad, the PCC offered a good opportunity to examine in detail the situation in the region and its transformation into a pilot project of cooperation between Russia and the EU by facilitating the transfer of persons and goods, and consolidating the economic, investment and social situation. After stressing the need for a stable and secure energy supply system and transparent economic climate, it finally welcomed the implementation of the Road maps on EU-Russia Four Common Spaces, the signing of the EU-Russia visa facilitation and readmission agreements during the EU-Russia Summit in Sochi on the 25 May 2006, Russia's future accession to the WTO, and the elaboration of the new "Northern Dimension" concept.

The *10th meeting of the PCC* took place in Brussels, on the 24-25 June 2008. The topics discussed were in particular EU-Russia relations and a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, Energy and Social Cohesion and prosperity.

During the discussion related to EU-Russia relations speakers underlined the importance of a new and global Strategic Partnership Agreement between the EU and the Russian Federation. The process of Russia's WTO accession, human rights and corruption issues were also debated. The PCC stressed that the new agreement on strategic partnership should be legally binding and covering all aspects of the relationship providing legal basis also for those areas of cooperation which are not reflected in the current PCA. The PCC also called for a full and flexible use of the visa facilitation agreement.

Before a general debate on EU-Russia energy relations Mr PIELBALGS, EU Energy Commissioner, commented on the EU-Russia energy dialogue, common projects, and energy relations pointing out that there was no contradiction between the EU and Russia's aspiration but that the legislation on energy remained different. Mr MERNIER, Secretary General of the Energy

Charter Secretariat, addressed the role of the Energy Charter. The PCC called for a closer cooperation within the framework of the EU-Russia energy dialogue, for the establishment of mechanisms for transparent, rule-based and negotiated dispute settlement in the field of energy and for an increased diversification of energy trade relations on both sides.

Concerning social cohesion and prosperity the PCC welcomed announced plans by the new Russian administration to strengthen the rule of law, improve business climate and fight corruption. The PCC also called to remove the remaining obstacles for Russia's accession to the WTO, following which the EU and Russia will be able to start the negotiations on a free trade area agreement.

The most recent *11th meeting of the PCC* originally scheduled for autumn 2008 was postponed until February 2009 after the EU decision to discontinue "business as usual" with the Russian Federation in the aftermath of the Georgia conflict. The meeting took place in Brussels, on the 16-17 February 2009 after the European Council had entered the Geneva talks on the South Caucasus and had rescheduled the negotiations for the new Partnership agreement. Topics on the agenda included again EU-Russia relations and a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, EU-Russia trade relations: effects of the financial and economic crisis and EU-Russia gas deals and future gas supplies.

The PCC called on the Russian Federation and the European Union to actively pursue the Partnership Negotiations and emphasised that the agreement should be comprehensive, legally binding and covering all aspects of the relationship. The PCC also underlined the importance of EU-Russia cooperation notably for the fight against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the fight against terrorism, transnational organised crime and corruption as well as for fighting climate change and in the field of environmental protection.

Concerning the effects of the financial and economic crisis the PCC emphasised the importance of increased cooperation and a global solution to the economic and financial crisis, the interest to the EU and Russia in diversification of energy supply routes and the need to act against protectionism. The PCC expressed its deep concern over the recent crisis in gas supplies to the European Union and called upon both the EU and Russia to strengthen the efficiency and crisis response capacity of the EU-Russia energy dialogue and to increase transparency.

The Working Groups

The cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation is also organised in the form of working groups. Meetings have taken place in Moscow, Murmansk, Samara, North West Siberia, the region of the Russian-Finnish border, Kaliningrad and Riga.

The topics included: human rights issues, the Chechnya conflict, environmental problems, Kaliningrad, border cooperation, the creation of the European Economic Space, nuclear waste issues, Russia-NATO relations, social development, and industrial policy.

The meeting of the *Working Group to Moscow and Samara, on the 14-17 April 2002*, focused on the industrial policy cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation, the conflict in the Middle East and Russia-NATO cooperation. In Samara the delegation visited a joint-venture company 'Eurotekhnik', (a German-Russian project). The delegation met with the local authorities and discussed economic and industrial priorities for the region and the possible ways of developing cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation in general and on Samara in particular. The delegation also visited the TACIS-funded projects: the department for Social Protection, elder people's centre and a health care centre. The delegation visited Togliatti, a major city in the Samara region and the centre of the Russian car manufacturing.

The *Working Group to Moscow and Murmansk, organized on the 2-5 October 2002*, was dedicated to the nuclear waste problems, human rights and the situation in Chechnya. In Murmansk the

delegation visited Adreeva Bay, which is the largest storage space for spent fuel from nuclear power vessels, as well as storage sites near Murmansk. The delegation was informed about the environmental, social, and health problems that storage of such an amount of very dangerous nuclear waste creates. The delegation took note of the significant safety concerns, the state of the storage facilities and the potential dangers. The delegation visited also the Nerpa shipyard, which dismantles, services and repairs second-generation nuclear submarines. The delegation viewed parts of the dismantling process. The delegation travelled to Atomflot's nuclear icebreakers base and visited Atomflot's facilities of nuclear icebreakers' maintenance.

On the 19-21 May 2003, the Working Group to Moscow was devoted to the situation of human rights and democracy in Russia, as well as to the overall situation in Russia and EU-Russia relations. Within an exchange of views with the representatives of Russian NGOs, special attention was paid to the situation in Chechnya and in the Russian civil society that the NGOs described respectively as very worrying and with little progress. While also concentrating on the EU-Russia relations with a special focus on cooperation in energy, science and technology, the Group ended its visit on the 21 May by meeting the Head of the Moscow Regional Administration.

The visit of the Working Group to Moscow and Salekhard (North Siberia) took place on the 7-10 July 2003. During the stay in Moscow, the Delegation held meetings concerning the constitutional reform in the Russian Federation, the constitutional rights of federal states and the follow-up to the constitutional reform. The delegation met also with the Energy Committee of the European Business Club. The meeting served as an exchange of views with business representatives of EU companies active in the field of energy in the Russian Federation. The delegation then travelled to Salekhard (North Siberia), where it met with the Natural Resources Administration, which is in charge of the exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons (crude oil, natural gas). 90% of gas produced in the Russian Federation is extracted in this region. The other important issue tabled was the cooperation of GOs and NGOs, particularly for the indigenous people. Landownership is a key question, both for industry and the rural and indigenous people. The delegation visited a settlement and a camp site of nomad indigenous people, and observed reindeer farming in the tundra, about 350 km north of Salekhard and the Polar Circle. Also the delegation saw the Yar-Sale settlement, which serves as a base for the reindeer herding indigenous people in the polar Tundra region. Finally the delegation visited the Cultural Centre of Yar-Sale. After returning to Salekhard, the concluding meeting discussed mainly the relatively critical view of the regional autonomous administration on the Kozak reform in the Federation, while agreeing on the overall necessity of the reforms.

Within the new legislative term, three Working Groups have been organized since 2004. *A Working Group to the Russian-Finnish border region and to Moscow was organized on the 18-20 April 2005.*

In a context of increasing attention to the EU-Russian border cooperation, the delegation spent the first day visiting the border facilities of both Finland and the Russian Federation in order to examine the experience of their cooperation on border management in more detail. On the next two days, the Group travelled to Moscow, where it met the Russian State authorities, the representatives of the Delegation of the European Commission, and Russian NGOs. The first meetings in Moscow were devoted to the human rights situation in Russia, with a particular focus on the situation in Chechnya, the xenophobia problem in the country and the work of the Russian judiciary and law-enforcement bodies. Finally, the exchanges of view at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the Federal Assembly mostly concentrated on the political and economic situation in Russia at the moment of the constitutional reform, as well as on the future of the EU-Russia relations in the wake of the 2004 EU enlargement and in the perspective of creation of the "Four Common Spaces".

The meeting of the *Working Group in the Kaliningrad Oblast on the 9-11 October 2005* particularly examined the possible transformation of the region into a joint pilot cooperation project between the

EU and Russia. After dialogue with the representatives of the central and regional administration and of the local industry and business, the Group agreed on the need to foster the economic and social development of the Oblast and offered its assistance. The necessary adoption of the Law on Special Economic Zone in Kaliningrad was stressed, and the idea of a “Friends” Club of Kaliningrad was generally welcomed. The members of the Working Group also visited several industrial, social and environmental projects, as well as the border-crossing point of Bagrationovsk, where they discussed border and visa related issues.

The Working Group convened in Moscow on the 21 June 2006 and in Riga (Latvia) on the 22 June 2006. Focusing on the outcome of the 17th EU-Russia Summit, the meetings in Moscow welcomed the signing of the EU-Russia visa facilitation and readmission agreements, and discussed the failure to achieve an agreement on energy relations, as well as the future framework of cooperation once the PCA expires in 2007. As for the visit to Riga, it was devoted to two substantial issues: EU-Russia border cooperation and the situation of minorities in Latvia. While regretting the absence of the final definition of EU-Russia border at the Estonian and Latvian lines, the Group welcomed the considerable progress observed in the integration of minorities in Latvia since its accession to the EU in 2004.

On 11-12 April 2007 the Working Group convened in Moscow. The agenda included the new Partnership- and Cooperation Agreement, energy policy cooperation, cross-border cooperation in the Northern Dimension policy and the Caucasus-Caspian Commission activity. The meetings with Russian counterparts centred on a wide range of bilateral and international questions, but mainly on energy cooperation and the obstacles to the start of negotiations of the new EU-Russia agreement. Members of the delegation also discussed the situation of democracy, rule of law and human rights in Russia with the representatives of Russian NGO's.

The meeting of the Working Group in St Petersburg from the 3-5 June 2007 discussed the EU-Russia Summit in Samara on 18 May, prospects of the start of negotiations on the new EU-Russia partnership agreement, economic relations and Russia's WTO membership perspectives. There was also an open exchange of views on various issues like the state of democracy and human rights in Russia, events in Estonia surrounding the relocation of the Soviet soldier memorial in Tallinn, US plans to build a part of its anti-missile defence system in Czech Republic and Poland, Kosovo's independence, the situation in the common neighbourhood, especially in Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus as well as upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia.

The Working Group convened in Moscow on 18 March 2008 and focused on EU-Russia Relations, EU-Russia Energy dialogue and EU-Russia Trade Relations. The meetings with the Russian counterparts centred on a wide range of bilateral and international questions, but mainly on energy cooperation and the obstacles to the start of negotiations of the new EU-Russia agreement. The parliamentarians also addressed issues such as the Strategic Sectors Bill, visa facilitation and the EU's internal energy market legislation. In a specially organised meeting, Members of the delegation also discussed the situation of democracy, rule of law and human rights in Russia with the representatives of Russian NGOs.

A visit to the State Duma in *Moscow from 24-25 October 2008* replaced a working group meeting scheduled for Astrakhan. Due to the European Union's decision not to go on with business as usual following the Georgia conflict, the European Parliament delegation reduced the programme to a short working visit and concentrated the agenda on the adversary position with regard to the Russian invasion of Georgia. The Working Group discussed the Human Rights Dialogue, PCA Negotiations and Intercultural Dialogue. It also engaged in an exchange of views with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister on the current state of EU-Russia relations and concluded the mission with a lengthy and insightful discussion with Russian NGOs on the Russia-Georgia conflict.

Ad hoc delegations to Chechnya

The ad-hoc delegation to Chechnya was created and mandated to report back to the Parliament on the decision of the Conference of Presidents of Political Groups in June 2002 to study the political situation and the living situation of the people in Chechnya, as well as the humanitarian situation, EU aid and Human Rights issues. A study visit to Chechnya took place between the 14th and 17th June 2003.

Main issues observed during the visit included: situation of the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) living in camps in Ingushetia, the working conditions of humanitarian NGOs, the UNICEF and the World Food Programme, the security situation in Chechnya, the physical destruction and reconstruction in Grozny, living conditions, the constitutional process and proposed attempts of reconciliation and peace making. The delegation looked into the case of Arjan Erkel, abducted in the North Caucasian region.

At the time of the visit, the delegation was informed that there were around 64,000 Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia, and a fourth of them lived in tent camps. 98% of the inhabitants in the tent camps did not want to return to Chechnya in the near future. The Delegation was taken to the Bart camp. Few young or middle-aged men were visible. They talked about relatives disappearing in Chechnya and about the very bad living conditions. This camp had been dismantled after the inhabitants return to Chechnya. The working conditions of relief organisations were described as extremely difficult. The authorities did not permit the organisations to use radio communication. Access to Chechnya depended on the assessments of the security situation issued by the Federal Security Service (FSB).

Kidnapping risk was still important throughout the region. The security arrangements surrounding the delegation were extensive. Soldiers, tanks and armoured personnel were noticed everywhere. Human rights NGOs had registered many hundreds of disappeared persons and collected testimonies which, as regards abductions, typically mentioned masked men using army and security forces' vehicles.

The physical destruction in Grozny seemed to be even more profound than the one observed in the former Yugoslavia. Almost all the blocks of apartments had been bombed and burned out. The centre of Grozny had been reduced to a wasteland. People lived on the lower floors of buildings and in low houses, which were in a better condition. One of the reportedly fourteen rebuilt sewage pumps was shown to the delegation. The delegation visited a primary school, a hospital and a kindergarten, all fully operating.

The ad hoc delegation recognised the attempts of the Russian Federation and of the Chechen Republic to stabilize the political situation by means of a constitutional process.

The case of Arjan ERKEL was raised during all meetings in order to underline the importance attached by the EU to Mr Erkel's safe return from abduction, finally achieved in May 2004.

The delegation members underlined that Chechnya should not be forgotten, and aid needed to be constantly supplied by the EU together with providing conflict management measures, improving the living conditions, the development of infrastructure and daily life. Post-conflict reconstruction and peace building measures were essential.

III. CONCLUSION

The relationship established between the European Parliament and the Russian political institutions, both at national and regional levels have developed considerably until 2008. After that point the relationship entered a particularly difficult period due to a series of conflicting positions, notably the Russia-Ukraine gas conflict, which left European consumers in the cold in January 2009, and the Caucasus conflict in August 2008. Negotiations for a renewal of the Partnership- and Cooperation Agreement came to a standstill and were only re-established in November 2008. They are however not making much progress since.

Interparliamentary meetings:

Second WG	14 - 17 April 1997 in Moscow and Samara
Sixth IPM	16 - 19 June 1997 in Moscow
First PCC	1 - 2 December 1997 in Brussels
PCC WG	22 - 28 June 1998 in Moscow, Irkutsk and Ulan Ude
Second PCC	16 - 17 September 1998 in Strasbourg
PCC WG	26 - 29 October 1998 in Moscow
PCC Bureau	2 December 1998 in Brussels
PCC WG	14 - 17 March 1999 in Moscow
PCC Bureau	15 September 1999 in Strasbourg
PCC Bureau	9 November 1999 in Brussels
PCC WG	26-28 June 2000 in Moscow
Third PCC	27 – 28 November 2000 in Brussels
PCC Bureau	16 January 2001 in Strasbourg
PCC WG	23 – 27 April 2001 in Moscow, Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg
PCC Bureau	30 May 2001 in Brussels
PCC Bureau	19 September 2001 in Brussels
Fourth PCC	26 – 27 November 2001 in Brussels
PCC Bureau	19-20 March 2002 in Brussels
PCC WG	14 - 17 April 2002 in Moscow and Samara
PCC Bureau	12 June 2002 in Strasbourg
PCC WG	3 - 4 October 2002 in Moscow and Murmansk
PCC Bureau	23 October 2002 in Strasbourg
Fifth PCC	25 - 26 November 2002 in Brussels
PCC Bureau	12-13 February 2003 in Strasbourg
Sixth PCC	24 - 25 September 2003 in Strasbourg
PCC WG	19 - 21 May 2003 in Moscow
PCC WG	7 - 10 July 2003 in Moscow and North Siberia
PCC Bureau	31 March 2004 in Strasbourg
PCC Bureau	12 October 2004 in Brussels
Seventh PCC	22 - 23 November 2004 in Brussels
PCC WG	18 - 20 April 2005 in the Russian-Finnish Border Region and Moscow
PCC WG	9 -11 October 2005 in the Kaliningrad Region
Eighth PCC	25 - 26 January 2006 in Brussels
PCC WG	21 - 22 June 2006 in Moscow and Riga (Latvia)

PCC Bureau	24 October 2006 in Strasbourg
PCC Bureau	22 November 2006 in Brussels
Ninth PCC	22 - 23 November 2006 in Brussels
PCC WG	11 - 12 April 2007 in Moscow
PCC WG	3 - 5 June 2007 in St Petersburg
PCC WG	18 March 2008 in Moscow
Tenth PCC	24 - 25 June 2008 in Brussels
PCC WG	24 - 25 October 2008 in Moscow
Eleventh PCC	16 - 17 February 2009 in Brussels

Ad hoc delegations:

Observation of Parliamentary Elections 16 – 22 December 1999
(Moscow, St. Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod)

Ad hoc delegations to Chechnya:

10 July 2002, Brussels

4 September 2002, Strasbourg

23 October 2002, Strasbourg

21 November 2002, Strasbourg

18 December 2002, Strasbourg

16 January 2003, Strasbourg

9 April 2003, Strasbourg

15 May 2003, Strasbourg

5 June 2003, Strasbourg

14-17 June 2003, Chechnya