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The EU-Russia cooperation in fighting terrorism

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The paper deals with the EU-Russia cooperation in fighting terrorism in the condition of sanctions. The author demonstrates that freezing the political dialogue has seriously decreased possibilities and potential of EU-Russia joint actions against the global terrorist threat. The main conclusion is that the shared interests in fighting terrorism and organized crime on the Eurasian space should override short-term tactical calculations.

Counter-terrorism cooperation was traditionally realized through Russia's bilateral relations with the EU member states. However, this important sphere was included in the EU-Russia's political agenda as well; it became the significant point of the Road maps on the common spaces of internal and external security. On September 1, 2010, the EU-Russia agreement on protection of classified information came into force, allowing the parties to exchange classified information, taking appropriate measures for its protection on the equal footing, in accordance with proper laws or regulations¹. The agreement was supposed to increase the efficiency of cooperation against terrorism. Besides, a working dialogue on fighting terrorism started in February 2011.

The last EU-Russia common initiative - the Joint statement on combatting terrorism - was made on January 28, 2014, just after the EU-Russia summit². It was highly appreciated both in

¹ The Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the European Union on the protection of classified information.

http://www.russianmission.eu/sites/default/files/user/files/Agreement%20on%20classified%20information_2010_English.pdf Experts emphasize the parity of the Agreement, which maintains autonomy of Russia's participation. See, for example Panos Koutrakos. The EU Common Security and Defence Policy. Oxford University Press, 2013. P.105

² Joint EU-Russia statement on combatting terrorism. Brussels, 28 January 2014.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/140835.pdf

the EU and in Russia; it appeared to be the only visible result of the EU-Russia summit before the political dialogue was frozen. In the Joint EU-Russia statement on combatting terrorism the parties committed to:

- considering possibilities for further strengthening cooperation in response to crimes committed by terrorists and organized crime, including exploring prospects of signing cooperation agreements in the future, to ensure, *inter alia*, an information exchange between Russia and the EU in the sphere of combating terrorism in conformity with their respective internal legislation including data protection standards;
- expanding cooperation in exchanging best practices in counter-terrorism and training experts in counter-terrorism through joint seminars, training courses and other activities;
- intensifying cooperation in the UN framework and other multilateral fora such as the G8, in particular G8 Rome/Lyon Group, and the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), OSCE, and the Council of Europe, as well as other international organizations actively involved in combating terrorism.

Cooperation under sanctions?

In July 2014, during the meeting between the RF Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Federica Mogherini, future Head of the EEAS, the parties also confirmed their desire to dispose of threats emanating from the Near East and the Northern Africa and touching upon both the people of the region and those in Europe and Russia.

It is well known that joint statements do not always lead to concrete actions, they just send a political signal to start consultations and negotiations on a series of substantial agreements - on extradition, mutual legal assistance, passenger name record (PNR) or financing of terrorism. Until now, the EU-US partnership is the only one that has managed to cumulate a number of those³. A similar list of activities was supposed to be adopted at consultations on combating terrorism within the Russia-EU political dialogue, which was, however, very soon frozen, and Russia's participation in G8 suspended. The EU sanctions, announced on July 16, 2014, imposed travel bans and asset freezes on 15 people, including the Head of Russia's Federal Security Service and the Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service. Four members of Russia's National Security Council were in the list as well. The RF Foreign Ministry denounced the sanctions, which demonstrated that the EU was taking "a complete turn away from joint work with Russia on international and regional security, including the fight against the spread of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism (and) organized crime."⁴

³ Renard Th. Confidential partnerships? The EU, its strategic partners and international terrorism. ESPO working paper n.4 January 2014, P.21

⁴ The RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement, 26 July 2014
http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/25A2BD25E3B202BD44257D1800253CCB

It should be noted, however, that operative contacts between Russian and European security services and law enforcement bodies have never been interrupted, but in the absence of political dialogue, their activities have become more complicated.

The Joint statement on combatting terrorism assured that EU and Russia “act on the premise that the fight against terrorism is a long-term process, requiring from the international community a complex approach and united efforts for countering terrorists striving to impose their will on states, both at national, regional and global levels”. However, it is not very obvious that the world is now able to rally around the fight with terrorism as in September 2001. Political disagreements on the roots of terrorism remain a serious obstacle to cooperation.

Russia’s position towards international terrorism has not changed – to fight terrorists one should support those who suffer from their actions the most, that is Iraqi and Syrian governments. This is “a key issue to resolutely counter the terrorists who are attempting to control increasingly larger territories in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and the Sahara-Sahel area. ...this task should not be sacrificed to ideological schemes”, the RF Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed in his speech to the 69th session of the UN General Assembly. Lavrov called to structure the struggle against terrorists in Syria in cooperation with the Syrian government, “which has already proven its ability to work with the international community by delivering on its obligations under the program to dispose of its chemical weapons”. He confirmed Russia’s resolution to supply the governments of Iraq, Syria and other MENA countries with weapons and military equipment and to support their efforts to suppress terrorists.

In addition, Lavrov suggested launching, under the auspices of the UN Security Council, “an in-depth study on the extremist and terrorist threats in all their aspects across the MENA area. This integrated approach also implies that long standing conflicts should be examined, primarily the Israeli-Arab conflict”⁵. Besides, Russia prepares to counter the terrorists’ attempts to act on Russian territory, and this is the main reason for cooperation with both the EU and the US by exchanging information, which has become the most important instrument of international struggle against terrorism.

However, as long as Russia-NATO’s and Russia-EU’s cooperation mechanisms remain frozen, counteracting terrorism cannot be successful. ISIL demands a more serious attitude and resistance. Its emissaries have appeared not only in Syria and Iraq, but in Libya, Lebanon, and North of Afghanistan, very close to Central Asia, from where they can maintain contacts with terrorists in Europe. The Islamists, who have arrived in Europe, will establish contacts with the similar terrorist groups in the North Caucasus. Terrorists interact on a broad front, and they do not take offence at each other. So a response must be based on unbiased analysis of the

⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Address by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 27 September 2014 http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/CDEA7854FF002B5A44257D62004F7236

problem, demonstrating the necessity of urgent political and diplomatic interaction, as well as cooperation of security services, military and law enforcement bodies. These mechanisms have functioned rather effectively, and that was not Russia's initiative to freeze them.

As the current situation in Europe touches upon Russia's interests and security, the joint activities to ensure security might be needed urgently. Immediately after the terrorist attack in Paris in January 2015 Aleksey Pushkov, the Chairman of the Russian State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote that "Russia and France need to reestablish relations and start cooperation against terrorism, as the terrorist attacks in France and in Russia emanate from the same source"⁶. The first appeal to consider Russia as an ally in fighting terrorism came on January 8, 2015 from the NATO General Secretary, who has previously kept on blaming Russia for threatening security.

The "Mogherini paper", which was prepared by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in January 2015, gives certain hope for restarting cooperation despite of "the evident differences between Russia and the EU on the Syrian crisis". Among other things, it recognizes the value of "existing counterterrorism dialogue with Russia"⁷. Still, the paper clearly demonstrates the conditional approach, which has been constantly rejected by Russia. In February 2015 Gilles de Kerchove, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, shared the same approach by stating that the situation in Ukraine had affected the EU-Russia's relations, although there had been no divergence of opinions on a scale of the terrorist threat. However, he appreciated Russia's initiative on drafting the Security Council Resolution targeting sources of financing for ISIL and emphasized the importance of information exchange⁸.

The question is – which principles could become the basis for cooperation? Russia rejects the EU's approach: cooperation might be restarted if Russia changes its attitude and behavior towards Ukraine. As Vladimir Chizhov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the EU stated, Russia does not need to return to *business as usual*, but rather more sensible, honest and open cooperation, which must be free from value-oriented approach and based on mutual interdependence.⁹ Until now, Russia has been considered "a partner as much as a target of European counter-terrorism efforts", and thus the EU "has developed counter-terrorism programs on Russia (more than with Russia)"¹⁰. The crisis in the EU-Russia relations, as well as the terrorist attack in Paris, might change the situation, if the EU recognizes Russia's key role in fighting the global threat.

⁶ RIA-Novosti News Agency, 8 January 2015. <http://ria.ru/world/20150108/1041754138.html>

⁷ Issue Paper on relations with Russia. Foreign Affairs Council of January 19 2015

⁸ RIA-Novosti News Agency <http://ria.ru/world/20150217/1048065199.html#ixzz3WWWaGeIN>

⁹ Vladimir Chizhov, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the EU. Interview to the ITAR-TASS News Agency, 24 December 2014 <http://itar-tass.com/politika/1669109>

¹⁰ Renard Th. Confidential partnerships? P.18

Potential cooperation on the Eurasian space

For a decade, Russia has tried to establish cooperation with the EU and NATO on the Eurasian space, having regarded them as important partners for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The SCO is involved in a number of programs against organized crime and drugs traffic, and the CSTO has conducted for many years the 'Channel operation' to seize drug convoys on their way from Afghanistan to Central Asia. In the pre-sanctions period a few steps were made to further develop the joint initiatives, and the EU Frontex agency participation in securing the Sochi Olympic Games in 2014 was regarded as a good starting point for cooperation. To continue, the plans were discussed to apply the acquired experience at the European Football Championship in 2016.

In November 2014, representatives of secret services of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and observing states agreed to exchange information on persons, who participate in military actions in the Middle East, in Syria and Afghanistan, return home and bring instability to the SCO area. At the moment, the normative base allowing the information exchange is under elaboration. Today, such information might be of vital importance to the EU, who has faced the same challenge.

On January 1, 2015, the Eurasian Economic Union became a reality, and thus Russia's proposal to establish relations between two integration groups – the EU and the EAEU – is taking on special significance and is being recognized by the European Union. Starting from economic integration, cooperation could go further. In this context, the support of the "Helsinki+40" process, designed to establish a "common and indivisible security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok" through the EU's closer links with the SCO and CSTO, should be considered an inevitable and urgent task in fighting terrorism and organized crime.

Recommendations

1. The shared interests in fighting terrorism and organized crime on the Eurasian space should override short-term tactical calculations. EU and Russia should concentrate more on the urgent security tasks.
2. The Joint EU-Russia statement on terrorism should be followed by a precise plan of joint activities, which would provide for deeper cooperation.
3. The discussion of a Free Trade Zone between the EU and EAEU should entail comprehensive analysis of their potential cooperation in fighting against terrorism and organized crime.

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