



"Donald Trump and the future of Russia – EU relations"

Global Conversation with Dmitry V. Suslov

November 30th 2016, Room TL, University of Rome Tor Vergata



Dmitry V. Suslov (born in 1979) is Deputy Director at the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies and Senior lecturer at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University - Higher School of Economics. Moreover, he is Deputy Director for Research at the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and Russian coordinator of the Working Group on the Future of the US-Russia Relations, which is a joint venture of the NRU-HSE and Harvard University. Since 2014, he is a Program Director at the Valdai International Discussion Club. In addition to the constant research, he acts as a regular consultant of the Russian government institutions and business enterprises on the US policies and US-Russia relations, EU-Russia relations and Euro-Atlantic security issues.

On November 30th, we -students of the second year of Global Governance- had the honour and the pleasure to meet Dmitry Suslov and to engage in a fascinating conversation with him about the past, the present and the future of the relations between European Union and Russia.

Mr. Suslov's speech focused on a dramatic paradox: after 27 years since the fall of the Berlin wall, EU and Russia are once again divided even if the two regions are completely compatible in economic terms and have always been historically close. Both emerged more or less at the same time (the dissolution of the Soviet Union dates back to 1991 and the Maastricht Treaty to 1992), thus Mr. Suslov introduced the issue with an historical perspective. Since Peter the Great, the idea of belonging to Europe was very strong in Russia; they had common culture, common history, common humanitarian space, but they were slightly different in their political space. Europe never had the purpose to Europeanize China or other Asian countries, while it had the purpose to Europeanize Russia. Historically all the threats that Russia had to face came always from Europe, from Napoleon to Hitler, to our contemporary NATO. Russia has always been obsessed by European security and it brought to an incredible institutional density of relations between the two

actors. Before the Ukrainian crisis, Russia and EU used to have two summits per year and in 2000 Russia proclaimed the “European Choice” affirming to officially belong to Europe. However, after the dynamism of the first years following the fall of the Berlin wall, the relations started to stagnate. Since 2004, EU and Russia started sharply to compete in the post-Soviet space and this competition definitely brought to the Ukraine crisis that we are still observing now. Someone argues that it exploded as a surprise, but it was only the result of years and years of eroded relations between Western Europe and Russia. Besides Ukraine, the outcome of the clash between two different ideals was a continuous sequence of sanctions and countermeasures; the most important was the securitization of energy trade. Energy is maybe the main issue that both have to face in this tense situation. While EU is trying to become less dependent on Russia, Russia is looking at another strong actor in the global arena: China.

Relations between Russia and European Union fundamentally changed over the years, shifting from direct relations Russia-EU to bilateral relations Russia-member states. At tactical level, the first type of contact is now sporadic if not totally frozen. Mr. Suslov attributed the roots of this process to a systemic contradiction: the different perceptions of “wider Europe”. In fact, while EU sees itself as the only pole, centre of the integration mechanism in a system of “concentring circles”, and wants to monopolize the idea of “Europe” and to affirm the concept of acceptance of EU superiority as sign of “Europeness”, Russia has another approach. It wants to represent another pole equal to the EU in Europe, the latter being different from “European Union”. According to Russia, there should be a cooperative -not confrontational- bipolar Europe. As a result, the “Bear state” started to perceive EU enlargement as a challenge and an interference especially in the post-Soviet space. Mr. Suslov related this attitude to the different visions of the end of the Cold War. For Russia, it dates back to 1989 and not to 1991. Soviets intentionally allowed the German reunification and the withdrawal of troops in order to be protagonist of the post-Cold War world. Russia aspired to remain a superpower as before, only “without communism”. For the West, Russia had to “return to Europe” and the idea of creation of post-Cold War world coincided with the expansion of western institutions and agencies, such as NATO. The latter was at the centre of a Russian initial misconception: “the European Union is the positive alternative to the military side represented by the North Atlantic Treaty”.

In conclusion, according to Mr. Suslov is impossible to restore the *status quo ante* the Ukrainian crisis, EU suffers an internal crisis, split among the members also about the future of relations with Russia (some are favourable to cooperation, others are for aggravating pressure) and it is consolidating the partnership with the United States, while Russia is turning his attention towards East (Eurasian Comprehensive Partnership and China).

Mr. Suslov described Trump’s victory as a revolution against US establishment. In fact, the new President criticizes many pillars of the liberal international order such as alliances, trade regimes, institutions and the American role of “policeman of the world”, adopting an utilitarian approach which is unwilling to drag the United States in situations that are not vital interests. The slogan “Make America great again” referred to US as a country, internally and not externally. According to Mr. Suslov, Donald Trump did not really approve the figure of Putin but used it in the electoral campaign as an additional anti-establishment element. Russia preferred Trump to Clinton, in particular for his departure from Atlanticism. Now, with an US-Russia rapprochement, the European Union needs to diversify its relations or

it will be even compelled to discuss again with Russia, opening up to new interesting scenarios.

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