

## **Strengthening the Economic Partnership**

Interview with Jean-Paul Blandinieres, Team Leader of Russian-European Centre for Economic Policy (RECEP); the “Europe” magazine



### ***What are the major tasks of Russian-European Center for Economic Policy?***

Our centre was established in 1995 by the European Union within the framework of the Tacis Project aiming at cooperation with Russia. Our priority was to create a special group which would combine experience accumulated both in the European Union and Russia in order to draw up recommendations to Russian authorities in the context of the pursued reforms. At the same time we contributed to the creation of Working Centre for Economic Reforms (WCER) which was supposed to maintain contacts with newly established RECEP and beneficiaries – the Government Office of the Russian Federation and the Presidential Administration.

Undoubtedly many changes have taken place since then, Russia has undergone a certain evolution. Now RECEP is at the fifth stage of its activity. It is a well-known organization with many partners who have become a link between RECEP and beneficiaries. We continue to cooperate with the Working Centre for Economic Reforms (WCER) and the Academy of National Economy (ANE).

I would like to mention that our status of a distinguished organization enables us to receive requests directly from beneficiaries. At present we are

engaged in activities mostly connected with processing such direct requests.

***You resumed the work of your centre in January this year. How can you account for an interruption in the activities of RECEP?***

I am responsible for the present, fifth stage of our activity. In spite of the interruption in work, RECEP has become distinguished and reputable enough to interest the Russian authorities in its activities.

Returning to the question of the aims of our activity, I would like to note that our major aim is the provision of beneficiaries with recommendations. When I say beneficiaries, I mean the Government of the Russian Federation, the majority of ministries, first of all the Ministries of Finance, Economy, Industry, etc. Besides, we are working in close cooperation with the Administration of the President and both chambers of the Federal Assembly – the State Duma of the Russian Federation and the Council of Federation.

First of all our recommendations pertain to the current social and economic reforms carried out by the government. The tempo of these reforms has been stepped up lately. Another line of our policy advice is connected with expansion of relations between the European Union and Russia. These two parties have a lot of signed agreements and treaties. Different mechanisms of cooperation are being developed and established in order to put these documents into practice. Therefore one of the tasks of RECEP is to assist the Russian Government in using these mechanisms.

It goes without saying that recommendations we draw up and provide are always based on the results of scientific research.

***What are the major achievements of the centre in your opinion?***

In my opinion the fact that we were able to resume our work in Russia is one of our major successes. For the past few months we have managed to receive more than twenty requests and there are also new ones incoming.

I think it is important that we have requests pertaining to the serious problems being under consideration of the government and related to the strategic goals much spoken of by the Russian President.

The bulk of our work is connected with the task of ensuring sustainable development of economy. Such development is one of the aims singled out by President Putin.

Another important achievement of the centre is our research work in the field of public management reform which is also prioritized by the Russian Government.

It is also worth mentioning that we deliver policy advice on the Russian budget issues. Besides, we give considerations and make study of the base mechanisms, for example, strategic planning. We have established a close cooperation with the RF President Administration in work on this issue.

***You have mentioned the Russian partners of RECEP. What are the structures you cooperate with in the European Union?***

Our priority task is to deliver communications from the European Union about the areas that fall under RECEP's scope of activity. Recommendations are based on the experts' opinions. Usually these are law experts. Besides we receive information from the national governments. Alongside with that, we work with experts who are officials in the European Union. In fact I belong to them too. Therefore RECEP staff is not only researches and university employees. We tried to make a balanced combination of scientists and experts working for administrations and governments.

I would like to note also that we plan to arrange study tours for the Russian official establishment to the EU countries in order to raise its awareness of the work of European governments. Moreover, we are willing to arrange tours for Russian officials to Brussels which would enable them to study work of the European Commission.

***What is your vision of the Common Economic Space which Russia and the European Union plan to create?***

I am sure that the Common Economic Space is a combination of mechanisms which would contribute to developing economic and trade exchange between the EU countries and Russia. The basic principle is that both parties should benefit from its creation so as to avoid a possibility of unequal relationships.

I believe that while creating and developing the Common Economic Space we should not resort to unbridled, unreasonable and excessive liberalism whose supporters would try to remove all the barriers to exchange.

At the same time neither party should resort to the chauvinistic protectionism.

In order to create effective public and economic space we should think over all the details, carry out all the necessary researches which would enable us to understand which measures are to be taken so that all the parties of the economic and trade exchange would be winning.

We pay great attention to the main aspects of the trade exchange, for instance, the energy dialogue. We plan to publish results of the research work which will show what measures can provide mutual benefits from such trade for the parties concerned. It is very important, taking into account that the interests of Russia and the European Union are complimentary.

There is no doubt that this kind of logic is to be followed in all the others fields of activity.

***Energy Dialogue is considered to be a core of the Russian-European economic cooperation. What are the other perspective and promising lines of cooperation except the energy sector?***

I think that one of the most important tasks of the Russian government is to diversify the production and consequently diversify the trade exchange.

Russia has become aware of the danger of the economic model basing first of all on oil and gas.

The RF President stated that economic growth is one of priorities. But the economic growth cannot be achieved without diversification of economy.

It seems to me that the sustainable economic growth is attainable, provided Russia is able to integrate into the world economy. This integration presupposes strengthening of economic partnership with the largest economies and economic associations. The European Union is certainly one of them.

When I speak about the economic partnership, I mean not only trade but also investments, arranging the work of companies from the EU in Russia. In this case we can speak either about direct investments, when European companies establish their branches in Russia or about the cases when Russian companies engage in production together with their EU partners provided their products meet all the necessary requirements. In this respect cooperation of Russian companies with the Airbus corporation is a shining example.

In my opinion it is due to such interaction that Russia will be able to achieve diversification of its economy.