

EU and Russia – Partners in Modernization

- Modernization is a multifaceted mega-project that embraces practically all aspects of social life. It is colloquially associated with a technological progress although a new technology is to be invented by individuals and adapted by a society and state. This simple truth firstly implies that there should be a conducive ideological and social environment for creative activity and pro-modernizing inventiveness which is not perceived as a blasphemy against perpetuated social traditions or as a defiance to incumbent political power. Henceforth modernization requires, secondly, a social system that is ready to accept, digest and get use of innovations. These two prerequisites establish a kind of functional linkage and feedback between a technological progress and economic development, on the one hand, and freedom which is legally confirmed and enables a creative activity of individuals. As the experience of the Western world has shown a socioeconomic modernization is inherently liaised with democracy and growing human liberties. These are *hommes et citoyens* who assure a maximized functioning of modernization.
- There were historical patterns of a selective and limited modernization that affected only few compartments of a society and state machinery, especially civil bureaucracy and military forces. That type of modernization might initially reveal some provisional dynamism, especially when the modernizing activity was propelled by a Messianic ideology. Nonetheless, as the history of the tsarist and *nota bene* Soviet empires demonstrates the original dynamics of socioeconomic take-off (“building of the “new world”) started soon evaporating with clustering portents of stagnation and decline. It ensued from the very fact that the selective modernization, while combining elements of modern (or even post-modern) development with violation and curbing of human and civil rights, must have induced contradictions within the system that eventually resulted in its collapse.
- Declarations of the present Russian leadership on indispensability of resuming the process of modernization in Russia are boosted, as one may judge, by the awareness of growing disparity between particular segments of socioeconomic life that was inherited from the past and aggravated by extensive economy which is based upon manufacturing and selling off the raw materials like oil and gas.
- Together with the whole UE and its member states Poland backs up all the Russian steps that accelerate the process of modernization. Bearing in mind the pivotal role of social and human aspects in any modernization Poland opts for EU assistance channeled towards those initiatives and undertakings that would solidify the Russian civil society and inject more stamina especially to the Russian middle class. As historical experience proves out it is a middle class and its backbone – small and medium size entrepreneurship – that constitute a solid foundation for civil society.
- In Polish understanding, support and assistance should be rendered to any activity in Russia that would enhance a system of legal protection and giving credit through a relevant banking system directed to the Russian small and medium size business. Its weakness as a skeleton of the Russian middle class entails an adequate helplessness of the whole class who seems to be sandwiched between bureaucracy with its proclivity toward corruption and criminal world which (especially in the decade of 1990) still blackmails and robs that sector of the Russian entrepreneurship. Poland has since the outset of its

transformation accumulated a significant experience how a state should support and assist that type of entrepreneurship in order to foster its development. Polish economy is basically founded upon a sector of petite and medium size business which has – as a recent crises showed – secured to it a vigor necessary to withstand the crisis.

- Another important basis for modern economy and society appears in the shape of local self-government which reflects good governance in its elementary nucleus. Without a democratically functioning and efficient self-government it would be naïve to expect that a central power will correctly in an appropriate manner fulfill its role, which implies, *inter alia*, a function of guardian of democracy. It is regrettable that this dimension of the Russian nation-wide administration displays a greatest deficiency of the overall administrative network. It can be said, on the contrary, that local self-government represents a strongest pillar of the Polish administrative system.
- Corruption has become a most ailing and penetrative disease of the post-Soviet sociopolitical realities. The disease contaminated the whole process of the tumultuous and largely illicit privatization in Russia, starting from the beginning of 1990s, and sneaked into the very foundations of the Russian statehood. And again, Poland has accumulated some relevant experience how to combat and gradually eradicate the plague of corruption and would be ready to share this experience with Russia.
- There is a relevant platform, namely the Polish-Russian Forum of Regions, to test and develop all these activities like shielding small and medium size business, developing local self-governance or eliminating corruption. The Forum constitutes an inherent part of wider bilateral agenda of cooperation aimed at promoting modernization, thus resembling some other bilateral arrangements between Russia and particular EU member states that strive after the same objective. Poland is ready, at the same time, to contribute its expertise as to transformation and modernization to an overall UE endeavor to underpin the modernization in Russia.
- One of the important social factors for spurring modernization comes from the domain of people-to-people contacts. Our experience prompts us that social mobility paves the way to the open society which marks a significant prerequisite for modernization and modernity. Poland will energetically support greater social mobility between UE and its neighborhood. We favor steadily moving ahead with the program of “common steps” between UE and Russia.
- Contacts and cooperation between youth from Russian and the EU member states becomes of paramount importance in this respect. Unfortunately, both categories of young people quite often expose anemic knowledge or simply ignorance as to Russia or European Union, respectively. It is, therefore, expedient to promote an exchange of youth between Russia and UE to warrant better mutual understanding and cooperation.
- Modernization does not equal to neglecting traditions and traditional identity of any nation. But it does presuppose getting rid of notorious faults and misdeeds of the past. The destalinization in the contemporary Russia, if it is understood as refutation of the golden myth of Stalinist “modernization” and progress, re-orientes popular mindset in Russia towards challenges and chances of modernity and thus broadens sociopolitical conditions for reforms and change.