



**14 PROPOSALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE RUSSIAN-GREEK PARTNERSHIP**

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Introduction

The partnership between Russia and Greece is a unique case of international relations, in that Russia and Greece have no serious claims towards one another that could impede the further development or improvement of their current level of cooperation. Nor are there any permanent irritants hindering initiatives from either side. Even so, despite the historical and cultural proximity of the two countries, over the last several years, Russian-Greek relations have stagnated and have lost a degree of significance, in part due to the abandonment of the Burgas-Alexandroupoli oil pipeline project and the suspension of military and technical cooperation between the two countries. The 2009 Greek debt crisis also relegated Russian-Greek ties to the background, focusing the government's efforts on economic recovery.

To a large extent, the current task of developing a new agenda that Russia and Greece face could be fulfilled using the tools of public diplomacy: intensifying expert interactions on matters of policy, security, history and culture and holding research conferences and seminars in close contact with the media. Research centers could provide the basis for the formation of a Russian-Greek lobby, which could become a key factor in the development of bilateral relations. To that end, the experts of Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS) in Athens have put forward 14 proposals for developing Russian-Greek cooperation in the short- and medium-term perspectives.

1. Intensifying expert interactions

The year 2015 could be dedicated to identifying points of leverage to activate Russian-Greek contacts, while maintaining a view towards revitalizing bilateral relations and identifying all potential areas of maximum development. Through joint efforts by Russian and Greek research centers, resources and opportunities should be found for reviving and enhancing cooperation between the two countries at the governmental level, as well as at the levels of business and research communities, NGOs and youth organizations.

Under this framework, joint efforts of Russian and Greek research centers should be intensified.

Discussions on cooperative activities between Russian and Greek research centers and organizations, people-to-people meetings and networking will contribute to the identification of resources and opportunities. A permanent platform should be constructed between Russian and Greek research centers. This will help the exchange of ideas and research experience, the identification of trends and common interests in specific thematic areas, and the discussion of opportunities and challenges for stronger synergies between Russian and Greek, and by extension European Research Infrastructure, policies.

Additionally, there is a need for continuous discussions on plans for strengthening and enhancing international cooperation between Greek and Russian scientists in different thematic areas within the EU Framework Program for R&D “Horizon 2020”, and the Russian Federal Targeted Program for R&D in Priority Areas of Development of the Russian S&T Complex for 2014-2020. These discussions require frequent follow-ups that would lead to the implementation of joint R&D projects. The Greek contact point for these activities is the General Secretariat for

Research and Technology that operates under the supervision of the Hellenic Ministry of Development and Competitiveness.

It can be safely concluded that cooperation between the research centers could become the basis for the re-formation of the Russian lobby in Greece and the Greek lobby in Russia.

2. Implementing projects involving the teaching of Greek in Russia and of Russian in Greece

To a great extent, the development of the Russian-Greek relations is hamstrung by the language barrier. To eliminate this, we need to expand the educational activities of Russian cultural institutions in Greece (primarily in the Athens Office of the Russian Center for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation) and to use the potential of the Pontic Greeks who have recently received Greek citizenship, but the majority of whom are Russian speakers. In order to promote the Greek language in Russia, we could leverage the resources of the Greek Cultural Center in Moscow, as well as those of other organizations supported by the Greek Diaspora, in closer cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Education. Intensifying the educational and research ties between our countries will involve enhancing exchange programs, allowing Russian undergraduate and graduate students to attend Greek universities (including the existing international scholarship program of Athens State University) and introducing similar programs for Greek nationals at Russia's leading universities and research institutions (Moscow State University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the RAS, Russian International Affairs Council, etc.).

Summer programs for learning Russian could be organized in Greece, starting from beginners and covering all levels of the language. Greek students could enjoy

rigorous coursework and an enriching cultural program of lectures. These programs could be a first step for promoting student exchange programs. Student exchange programs could provide young people with an unforgettable awareness and lifelong appreciation for one another.

An important initiative that could also be implemented is the creation of university networks between Russia and Greece which would run joint programs that would ideally result in joint degrees, especially at post-graduate and doctoral levels. Students exchange programs and joint university programs should ideally function with pilot projects during the Russian-Greek cross-year in 2016.

3. Launching early preparation for the Russian-Greek cross-year

At the request of the Greek Government, the Russian-Greek Cross-Year has been moved from 2014 to 2016. These additional two years of preparation will enable us to scale up the planned events. In addition to cultural and awareness projects (exhibitions, festivals and presentations), it would be a good idea to hold an extended Russian-Greek business forum, aimed at identifying new opportunities for economic cooperation, as well as a series of themed events dedicated to particular cooperation avenues (energy, transport, agriculture, tourism, etc.)

Additionally, a Russian-Greek Young Entrepreneurs Forum could be launched that would be aimed at helping young entrepreneurs acquire relevant skills for the management of small or medium-sized enterprises by spending time in the two respective countries. The Forum could contribute to improving their know-how and to fostering cross-border transfers of knowledge and experience among young entrepreneurs. The Forum would also bring together young people in order to prepare them to be the next generation of business leaders in their countries. It could also help its members realize their full potential, so that young entrepreneurs

could contribute fresh, effective ideas and provide feedback to the future of Russian and Greek businesses.

4. Continuing inter-parliamentary cooperation

Inter-parliamentary cooperation, with its long-standing traditions and elaborate legal framework, has always been a vital component of Russian-Greek relations. The MPs of both countries should continue coordinating their approaches on the key issues involved in the work of the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe, the OECD, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSECO), and other organizations. They should also continue inviting representatives of businesses, research institutes, their respective Orthodox Churches, and members of civil society to inter-parliamentary meetings. Another feasible step would be to include a statement on the value of developing Russian-Greek relations in the program documents of the leading parliamentary parties of both countries. This would direct the MPs' attention to the topic of the Russian-Greek relations, particularly in the area of economic cooperation.

Nowadays, Greek-Russian inter-parliamentary cooperation has been frozen because of the EU sanctions on Russia. Greek foreign policy towards Russia has been influenced by the embargo imposed by the European Union.

5. Facilitating tourism

Over the last few years, Greece has become one of the most popular tourist destinations for Russians: in 2013, over 1 million Russian holidaymakers visited Greece.¹ To attract even more Russian tourists to Greece, Greek hospitality businesses need to diversify their products (some promising areas are medical tourism, agricultural tourism and religious pilgrimages), while attracting foreign

¹ Greek Tourism: Figures and facts – 2013 (Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE)). URL: <http://www.slideshare.net/setegreece/sete-facts-figures2013>

investment (including from Russia). Another measure would be to step up the promotion of Greece as a holiday destination in the Russian regions, with the support of the Greek Embassy in Moscow, Greek consulates, and Hellenic cultural and educational organizations present in Russia.

As regards to medical tourism, Greece has now the potential to compete in the rapidly growing "middle market" of Medical Tourism, but it has suffered in the recent past from the absence of a comprehensive national strategy. Since the end of 2013, there have been very important developments.

Metropolitan Hospital is the first hospital in Greece certified at the level of "Excellence in Medical Tourism" among other hospitals worldwide. It is the first Greek hospital to receive the certificate by TEMOS International, the International Certification Organization in Medical Tourism. It has also become a member of the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE). According to its own data, around 20% of admissions at Metropolitan Hospital are international patients. It accepts all major European and US insurance companies and it has direct billing contracts.

In September 2014, Athens Medical Group was the first private health organization to become a member of SETE and establish collaboration between the two entities towards the development of medical tourism in Greece. Athens Medical Group is also certified at the level «Excellence in Medical Tourism» by TEMOS International. This upgrade is for its two modern health units, Athens Medical Center and the Inter-Balkan Medical Center in Thessaloniki. Meanwhile, the Athens Medical Group has moved to a strategic partnership with Mouzenidis Group, a Greek holding company with primary activities in Russia. This agreement also gives Mouzenidis Group opportunities to attract patients in more than 70 points from the former Soviet republics.

It is expected that other large private health organizations will follow suit. According to estimates and studies from tourist agencies, 5 million elderly tourists will come to Greece by 2020. In general, it is estimated that elderly tourists will constitute 24% of the total health market in 2030.² It is clear that Greece has the potential and infrastructure to rank among the most popular Medical Tourism destinations and become an international "brand name" in the sector.

6. Simplifying visa procedures

An effective way to increase tourist traffic from Russia would be to provide Russians more opportunities to take short trips to Greece on national visas, within the limits set in the European and Greek legislation. Greek consulates should expand their practice of issuing visas (e.g., for real estate owners), continue the practice of granting short-term visas to Russians arriving to Greek islands from Turkey and other non-EU countries, and begin issuing long-term multiple-entry visas (for a term of over a year) more actively. Russia, in turn, could liberalize its visa policies with respect to Greek nationals. In particular, it would be advisable to: 1) extend the term of tourist visas from 30 days to six months 2) simplify visa procedures for tourists not using travel agent services (making online reservation confirmations acceptable confirmation of place of stay, in addition to paper hotel vouchers) and 3) extend working hours for submitting visa applications to Russian consulates.

7. Enhancing transport links between the two countries

Even though the number of flights between the major cities of Russia and Greece has been gradually increasing, it is still not enough. Since the current average price of a flight to Greece is still considerably higher than those of flights to other European countries (e.g., Germany), many Russians use connections (in Istanbul,

² Anna Stergiou: The "bet" in medical tourism // Enet.gr, 05.09.2014. URL: <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=446119> (in Greek)

Belgrade, Chisinau, etc.). A promising line of work here is to develop low-cost flights *Moscow / St Petersburg – Athens / Thessaloniki*.

8. Developing joint tourism and hotel business projects

Greek entrepreneurs' expertise in tourism and hotel industry could be used in the Crimea, the Krasnodar Region and other areas of renewed hospitality activities. Greek investors have an indisputable competitive advantage here, given their general popularity with the locals, as well as the presence of a large Greek diaspora in the south of Russia. In turn, Russia should develop a framework of measures aimed at attracting international capital (particularly from Greece) into its tourism sector by, among other things, making presentations on the area's recreation potential and providing additional investment protection guarantees.

There are great investment opportunities in the Greek tourist sector. The latest estimation of November 2014 by the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE) is that the total number of arrivals of visitors from abroad was approximately 23 million in 2014³, an increase of 15% compared to the number in 2013. That happened because of the clear extension of the tourism season with an increase in arrivals of 36.4% in April 2014, and with a 23.5% increase in October 2014 compared to the same period of 2013.

The number of tourists from Russia declined by about 15-20% in 2014⁴, that is by approximately 1 million people in 2014, mainly because of the ruble devaluation (which reached almost 20% during this past summer). As a consequence, money

³ International tourist arrivals, January-October 2014: Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE) estimates, 10.11.2014. URL:

<http://sete.gr/GR/KENTRO%20TYPOY/Idisis%20ke%20Anakinosis/?naID=2394>

⁴ Dimitris Charitidis: 15% -20% less tourists from Russia in Greece this year //

Business2travel.wordpress.com, 11.11.2014. URL:

<https://business2travel.wordpress.com/2014/11/11/%CE%B4%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B7%CF%84%CF%81%CE%B7%CF%83-%CF%87%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%B4%CE%B7%CF%83-%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%B3%CE%BF%CF%84%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%B9-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1-15-20-%CF%81/> (in Greek)

spent by Russian consumers in Greece was significantly less than in 2013, with signs of a collapse in specific sectors like jewelry.

It is estimated however that when the present tense situation between the EU and Russia ends, an increasing number of tourists from Russia will start visiting Greece again, thus giving significant benefits to the Greek tourism industry.

The latest data confirms the excellent dynamics of Greek tourism. Despite the worsening economic climate in Europe and Russia and the highly volatile security environment in the wider region, by the end of 2014, Greece is expected to rise into the top 15 in the world ranking of the top international tourism destinations. So direct investment in the hotel infrastructure of Greece could be very profitable for Russian funds and could help in job creation, especially for young people who are currently the most vulnerable part of the Greek unemployed labor force.

Emerging opportunities for Russian funds to buy luxury hotels in Greece are significant and viable. According to the latest restructuring plans of the Greek banks, all the assets and businesses that do not belong to their core functions as banking and financial institutions have to be sold. In this context, tourism businesses will be surely the first to be sold.

9. Assessing the potential for enhancing business connections

To assess the potential of Russian-Greek business cooperation, it would be advisable to conduct a poll among the businesses of both countries in order to identify promising lines of cooperation (mutual investments, trade and infrastructure projects). It is important to determine the key drivers of this cooperation, as well as the primary obstacles to progress. On the basis of this study, a technical paper could be prepared in the two languages, containing recommendations for improving the business environment.

The pharmaceutical industry in Greece represents an important sector of the economy and is a major employer in production, research and development, and distribution, both wholesale and retail.

The Greek pharmaceutical industry is currently showing powerful momentum. The significance of the local pharmaceuticals production lies in its contribution to the Greek economy in terms of GDP, employment and competitiveness. Exports of pharmaceutical products hold the fourth biggest share in the total exports of Greek processing and there is potential for improvement. According to the Hellenic Association of Pharmaceutical Companies (SFEE), the industry grew significantly in the 1960s, and over the last 20 years, its production processes have been characterized by horizontal integration.

The current momentum of the Greek pharmaceuticals industry has been noticed by certain high-profile international companies. Also notable is the accelerating involvement of the industry in the promising new market of generics. Historically, generics have held a low share of the Greek market, but new legislation guarantees that generics will become widely prescribed. As a result, Watson Pharmaceuticals acquired Specifar Pharmaceuticals⁵, a Greek generic pharmaceutical developer, manufacturer and marketer, for 562 million USD in May 2011. The transaction was significant, at a period close to the first Greek PSI. This sector presents opportunities for Russian-Greek cooperation, especially because Greece's generic product utilization is currently one of the lowest in Europe, thus providing Russian companies with a significant opportunity to capitalize on growth in this market.

Additionally, Greek shipping companies present a profitable investment for Russian funds. Greek ship-owners are among the leaders of the global shipping industry. They control 16% of the global fleet in terms of dwt and own 23.5% and

⁵ Watson Pharma buys Greece's Specifar for \$562 million // Reuters, 25.05.2011. URL: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/25/us-watson-idUSTRE74O59R20110525>

18.5% of total tanker and bulker tonnage, respectively. In 2013, Greek ship-owners invested approximately \$13 billion for 275 new vessels, estimated at 25% of the global order-book. This new shipping investment was supported by capital increases of 1.034 billion USD, which involved international investment funds. This trend grew even stronger in the beginning of 2014. Greek shipping companies excelled in capital markets in raising required investment funds to support further ship purchases. For example, in February 2014, Greek shipping companies managed to raise approximately 200 million USD,⁶ Greek ship-owners still need more funding, but European banks do not appear to be lending more in the shipping industry, as consequence of the ECB policy for the restructuring of European banks.

That said, Russian-Greek cooperation in the shipping industry could materialize in two ways; the first is through the formation of private equity funds or the participation in existing ones that could either buy directly new corporate bonds of Greek shipping companies or buy old ones when in need of restructuring old loans. The second way is through the direct funding of Greek shipping companies with specific financial products, including the option of acquisition of shares in return for private equity funds.

10. Considering the participation of Russian companies in the privatization of Greek assets

There is a long tradition of investment cooperation between Russia and Greece that continued to develop even throughout Greece's crisis-ridden years at the beginning of the 2010s. Some examples are the purchase by Russian investors of a controlling share in the Thessaloniki football team PAOK FC and the SEKAP

⁶ John Nikolaou: Greece Remains at Top of Shipping Economy// Maritime-Executive.com, 19.02.2014.
URL:<http://www.maritime-executive.com/article/OpEd-Greece-Remains-at-Top-of-Shipping-Economy-2014-02-19>

tobacco company. Real estate remains a priority and is aided by the targeted policy of the Greek authorities.

Greece's current gradual economic recovery, coupled with structural reforms, will open up new opportunities for Russian businesses to participate in the privatization of Greek companies. An example of this could be the investment by the Chinese company COSCO in the Greek port of Piraeus, which will help Greece strengthen its positions in international trade and give Chinese businesses wider access to European markets. Attracting Russian investors to the Greek energy sector might be difficult owing to tightening European regulations (the EU Third Energy Package) and the European Commission's antitrust investigation of Gazprom. Yet, in other industries, including railway transport, Russian investment could be mutually beneficial. The factors of success in these cases would be the Greek party's presentations on the country's investment potential in addition to the full disclosure of information about the state-owned assets approved for privatization to potential Russian buyers.

11. Stable further cooperation in the energy sector

Although Greece remains a major importer of Russian commodities (primarily oil and gas), import diversification is a top priority for political and expert communities throughout the country. It should be noted that this policy is dictated not only by the general EU strategy of reducing dependence on Russian gas, but also by Greece's objective concerns about the reliability of energy supplies from Russia. Over the last few months, these concerns have been further accentuated by the Ukraine crisis. Russian energy corporations should pay special attention to these concerns and intensify the dialogue on oil and gas with Greek actors (the government, political parties, gas distribution companies and the expert community).

Gazprom's decision to freeze the South Stream project as a result of Bulgaria's position on the matter does not mean that Russia is turning away from plans to diversify gas supplies to the European Union. On the contrary, the construction of a new pipeline to Turkey with a capacity of 63 billion cubic metres of gas (of which just 14 billion cubic metres is intended for the Turkish market) should create new possibilities for this. In light of the fact that gas will be exported through Greece, the country will have the opportunity to gain a foothold as a major energy hub and become the "gate" for the delivery of Russian gas to Europe.

12. Enhancing military, security and technical cooperation

In the pre-crisis period, Greece was a large importer of Russian weapons. However, austerity measures have forced Greece to back out of a large number of planned contracts. Given the current limitations of the Greek budget, it would be advisable to consider credit supply and other forms of military cooperation, including maintenance by Russian specialists of Russian weapons already purchased, additional supply and repair bases for the Russian navy, or joint exercises for command staff.

Under the current geopolitical circumstances, Russian-Greek security relations are interest-based in the context of energy security, threat perceptions on Islamic terrorism with ISIS as a focal point, and military procurement programs.

Greece's potential to turn into a strategic regional energy partner in the East Mediterranean offers opportunities for a long-term roadmap on Russian-Greek energy relations in the European context. Beneficial synergies on energy security require a shift of Russian-Greek energy relations from a pure supplier-consumer relationship towards a more technology-based cooperation. The establishment of an integrated network infrastructure necessitates mutual contributions to ensuring energy security with the improvement of the legal framework governing both

countries' relations, which should contain solid provisions on investments and technology exchange. Additionally, energy cooperation and security can be achieved through the participation of Russian companies in the development of gas deposits in Greece and the construction of new gas pipelines, the organization of joint training programs and activities, with business sponsorship, for gas specialists from both countries, and the conduct of advanced joint technology projects for the development of future uses of natural gas. Special focus needs to be given to safety and environmental issues, including the elimination of gas flaring, as well as carbon capture and storage for enhanced oil recovery in maturing fields.

Russian-Greek security cooperation cannot ignore the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism as practiced by ISIS. It is important to clarify that ISIS is an existential threat not only to Arab and Muslim states where both Greece and Russia maintain vital interests, but also to religious minorities and western countries. In fact, its military victories in Syria and Iraq make it the first Sunni extremist group to control territory, enhancing its ability to recruit fighters, acquire wealth and additional territory, and project a global end-state. For an effective containment of ISIS, Greece and Russia need to work as part of a regional consortium and develop not only a strategy to prevent ISIS from sustaining itself through energy sales, but also work with local communities and local leaders to put an end to the killing of innocents and promote the de-radicalization of people.

Russian-Greek security relations can be part of an emerging regional architecture as a counter-balance to threats emanating from Islamic fundamentalism. On this basis, both countries can schedule the conduct of a series of aeronautical exercises in the Greek airspace over the Aegean Sea similar to the exercises of January 2009. Equally important is the expansion of Russia's share in Greece's military procurement programs. Notably, Russia has supplied Greece since 1998 with Tor-M1 and Osa-AKM surface-to-air missile systems, Kornet anti-tank guided missile systems, Krasnopol-M1 cannon-launched and fin-stabilized semi-automatic laser-

guided explosive projectile systems. Given that Greece has altered its defense spending priorities mainly because of its evolving economic crisis, Russia is well placed in Greek decision-making for the purchase of Russian equipment still with some noted regularity.

13. Coordinating work in the Middle East

The persisting conflict potential in the Middle East (the Syrian civil war, the political crisis in Egypt, tensions in Iraq) and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism present a common threat to the safety of both Russia and the West. Since there is no sign of rapid progress in the region, it is necessary to rely on nearby states and allies for support. We must keep in mind the increasing importance of Greece in this context, as it is both NATO and the EU's main eastern stronghold.

Greece is a member of the Schengen Agreement, which allows any potential Islamic terrorist of European origin to travel unobstructed to another EU country, and hence to find his/her way to the areas of the "holy war." Legal challenges are also a major potential obstacle as terrorist networks are becoming ever savvier in manipulating the law of democracies. The obvious fear is that these persons, the so-called "European Jihadists", members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), indoctrinated, radicalized to the core and well trained in killing as part of doing their "holy" work, will possibly form terrorist cells inside Europe with the objective of causing as much havoc as they can.

For Greece, it is especially important to prevent the terrorist threat in the Balkans from spreading, while it is equally important for Russia to protect the North Caucasus. This challenge calls for more active cooperation between Greece, Russia, the USA, Israel, Jordan and other Middle Eastern stakeholders. Working on a joint agenda for this issue could be complemented by joint efforts along other

lines of cooperation, such as fighting illegal immigration, drug and arms trafficking.

14. Enhancing dialogue within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization

In response to the growing tensions in the Black Sea region caused by the Ukrainian crisis, it would be feasible to promote dialogue under the auspices of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSECO), in which Greece could initiate a series of joint meetings and conferences. The political environment of the BSECO region is traditionally fraught with complex challenges and the risk factor of potential friction is always high. BSECO is an active contributor to regional security and thus could become the main platform for discussing interregional security and economic cooperation issues.

In terms of economic cooperation, the Greek and Russian Chambers of Commerce can promote the regular exchange of information with the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), headquartered in Thessaloniki so that the Bank becomes active in the implementation of BSECO-sponsored projects.

Additional Russian and Greek common course of action can be promoted in the area of maritime affairs with a focus on joint activities and efficient maritime transportation, green energy and sea tourism. Also practically, Russia and Greece can work with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to develop certain types of tourism in the Black Sea region, such as film tourism and gastronomic tourism.

Despite its lack of direct geographical access to the Black Sea, Greece has gained leverage to promote initiatives in the region, such as strengthening control over the migration flows via the Black Sea and adjacent territories, implementing joint energy projects in the Balkans.