

each side.

The EU had unrealistic expectations about the speed of modernization, democratization and development of the market economy in Russia. And for its part, Russia had unrealistic expectations about the willingness of the EU to make changes and concessions to accommodate Russia. Both sides have underestimated the gap between our prevailing values. Cultural change is a slow process. These misperceptions reflect the fact -- a legacy of history -- that European decision-makers have a poor understanding of Russia, and Russian decision-makers have an equally inadequate understanding of the political and legal culture of Western Europe.

A third problem is a lack of consensus and drive on both sides. Interest in developing a strong partnership with Russia varies widely between and within EU countries. On the Russian side there are doubts as to whether Russia really wants closer integration with the EU and to espouse European values. These issues need to be resolved if we are to rebuild confidence and move forward. With sufficient will on both sides, they can be resolved. What do we need to do to move forward?

First, self-education. We need to educate ourselves better to bridge the gap in understanding so that we have a more realistic basis for decision-making. Second, strategic priorities for the medium term. What positive results can we realistically expect to achieve in the next five years? Where do the priorities of Russia and the EU overlap? We need a clearer definition by both the EU and Russia of our strategic priorities.

Third, long-term vision. We should instigate frank debate at the highest levels about our common goals, to produce the strategic vision that is currently lacking. This will help us to converge. It will put the roof on the house.

Fourth, time frame. We need to develop one that is realistic, to better appreciate the time needed to achieve change. Fifth, visible progress on specific issues. There are several steps we can take in the short to medium term to develop cooperation on energy supply, terrorism, crime and drugs, foreign policy cooperation and Russia's accession to the WTO.

Sixth, legislation. Where possible, we should push ahead with the harmonization of legislation and standards. This will facilitate trade and investment. And seventh, investment in the next generation.

We should develop programmes to promote exchanges of young professionals and encourage joint education and training, in order to foster future cooperation. Among these steps, let me stress the importance of developing a common vision. It is impossible for a Russian or a West European to say with certainty whether or not Russia might become a member of the EU, because we have not reached the time when this question can be addressed in a sensible way. No one knows how Russia will develop or what the Russian people will want.

Nor can we define how the EU will develop in the next 10 or 20 years. So it's the wrong question to ask. It's too soon. But my Russian friends make two points in reply. They warn that there is a sense of exclusion in Russia, made stronger by the EU's enlargement and by the prospect of negotiations on Turkish membership. And they argue that, if you want convergence, you need to know the destination. They are right on both counts. This is why we need to commit ourselves, at the highest level and over a long period, to a common vision of Europe's future that includes Russia, and includes freedom of movement across our common continent, freedom of trade and freedom of ideas.

Many elements of this vision, of a close association of sovereign states, sharing principles of democracy, the rule of law, civil and political rights, and the market economy, exist. But the commitment does not, yet. Nothing should be excluded from this vision. I disagree with those who argue that the EU and Russia must forever remain separate poles in a multipolar world.

Of course, it will take time. But if we agree on the long-term destination, on a vision of a joined-up Europe, we shall cope much better with the inevitable bumps and bends in the road, and can avoid being thrown off course by short-term events.