Southeast Asia in Russia’s Foreign Policy under D.Medvedev:  
An Interim Assessment

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In “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation”, adopted immediately after Dmitry Medvedev, the new President of Russia, took office, fostering relations with the countries and international organizations of the Asia-Pacific region was outlined as the top priority. An important direction of this strategy, worth developing in both concept and in practice, was Southeast Asia (President of Russia 2008). Concurrently, top Russian officials repeatedly stressed that cooperation with the individual Southeast Asian countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had a considerable potential and would deliver substantial strategic benefits to both Southeast Asia and the Russian Federation (Посольство РФ в СРВ 2009).

The latest manifestation of growing optimistic perceptions became apparent during the Second Russia-ASEAN Summit, held in October 2010, at which the Russian leader put forward ambitious plans regarding the cooperation with the partners from Southeast Asia on a wide range of economic, political and humanitarian issues (President of Russia 2010).

But making declarations is one thing while translating them into reality is another. All the more so since the progress in Russia-ASEAN dialogue is unlikely to be rapid and impressive; as Moscow’s regional profile is currently facing a series of significant challenges which will grow stronger in the years to come. Under these circumstances, a broad and in-depth analysis of Russia’s policy in Southeast Asia under the presidency of D.Medvedev, as well as a realistic assessment of its future prospects, becomes an important analytical task.

The article consists of three parts. Part one reviews economic and strategic positions which Moscow attained in Southeast Asia before D.Medvedev took office. Part two focuses on the policy directions being developed by the current Russian leadership and the problems it is currently facing. Part three portrays the major trends which will shape the strategic landscape of Southeast Asia in the foreseeable future and their repercussions for Russia-ASEAN relations. The conclusion summarizes the foregoing analysis.

A Retrospective View

In hindsight, it can be argued that during the Soviet era Southeast Asia didn’t loom large in Moscow’s strategic priorities. In fact, even in the late 1960s – early1980s, when Soviet profile rose to prominence in the region, Moscow’s policy had serious inherent limitations. The most significant of them are presented below.
First, the USSR was driven almost entirely by the anti-China factor rather than a firm and conscious decision to establish itself as an influential regional actor. It can be vividly exemplified by the Soviet Union’s unwillingness – based largely on limited resources – to expand its military presence beyond the bases in Vietnam. Major trends in relations between Moscow and Hanoi, the depth and scale of which directly reflected the dynamic of Soviet-Sino dialogue, are another case in point.

Second, Soviet policy was ideologically oriented and, therefore, lacked flexibility. Take, for instance, the downward trends prevailing in relations between Moscow and Jakarta from late-1960s to late-1980s, in spite of the fundamental strategic necessity to strengthen ties with the most influential Southeast Asian country. Or apprehensions about the establishment of ASEAN, which was seen as a kind of “mini-SEATO” – in spite of the ZOPFAN concept which almost immediately became the cornerstone of ASEAN’s relations with the major powers.

Third, Moscow seriously underestimated the rise of nationalism within both individual countries and Southeast Asia as the entire region. Consequently, very few figures in top Soviet leadership and expert community had proper understanding of the scope and nature of political and economic modernization in non-communist states, as well as their real motives to speed up the processes of regional integration.

On their part, the ASEAN countries also lacked a strong motivation for developing relations with the Soviet Union. The reason was manifold. Thus, the association, which had declared its intention to find “regional solutions to regional problems”, feared to get involved by some way or another in Sino-Soviet confrontation. Apart from it, in late-1970s – mid-1980s the ASEAN leaders tended to see the emergence of the Cambodian problem as a logical result of Soviet-Vietnamese rapprochement. Last but not least, both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of Soviet military presence in Southeast Asia paled in comparison with the corresponding characteristics of American forward deployment forces.

In the light of the above-mentioned, in late-1980s relations between the Soviet Union and the six countries of ASEAN were underdeveloped, which can be proved by the comparison of ASEAN’s trade with the US and the Soviet Union – 41 billion in 1989 (ASEAN Secretariat 1990) and 1 billion in 1990 (Николаев 1991) respectively. To compound the problem, Soviet-Vietnamese and Soviet-Laotian cooperation had entered a phase of depression, with Moscow considerably reducing its military and economic assistance to Hanoi and Vientiane. As a result, at the dawn of the Post-Cold war era Moscow’s presence in Southeast Asia and the degree of its influence on the regional political and economic processes were virtually non-existent.

The beginning of the 1990s revealed further growth of downward trends in Russia’s relations with the states of both ASEAN and Indochina. Thus, ASEAN’s trade with the Russian Federation fell to $0.6 billion in 1993 (Mihoko 2007, 132), as compared to $84 billion in ASEAN’s trade with the US in 1994 (Holloway 1995, 30). Simultaneously, Moscow virtually cut off its ties with Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

Nevertheless, the ASEAN countries were far from tending to exclude the very possibility of fostering relations with Russia. Their motivation was based on the following calculations. First, in the early 1990s ASEAN was busy creating a new system of “strategic checks and balances” simultaneously trying to establish itself as the locomotive of multilateral dialogue platforms in Asia-Pacific. Consequently, the association couldn’t ignore the legal successor of the former superpower – especially against Moscow’s growing rapprochement with Beijing. Second, the ASEAN countries sought ways to diversify the sources of arms supplies, regarding Russia as a promising partner.

Under these circumstances, the relations between Russia and ASEAN gained a fresh impetus. For instance, in 1995 Vietnam and Malaysia became major importers of Russian arms. Moscow’s membership in ASEAN Regional Forum and acquiring the status of ASEAN full dialogue partner in 1996 are also cases in point.

But these positive developments failed to get a second wind. As things were, during and in the immediate aftermath of the Asian economic and financial crisis 1997-1998 and the concurrently occurred financial default in the Russian Federation both parties had to focus on their inner problems. Consequently, their contacts were suspended, and the relations logically entered a new phase of stagnation.
Given these developments, on the eve of the new millennium the outcomes of Russia’s policy in Southeast Asia could hardly have been interpreted as impressive or even satisfactory, as real achievements were short of expectations. This assessment is based on the following reasons. First, Moscow’s policy was reactive rather than proactive, with its essence being of a sporadic rather than conscious and coherent character. Second, this policy was not carefully balanced – the economic side of cooperation lagged far behind the political one. Third, neither Russia nor ASEAN regarded each other as a promising partner – in spite of solemn declarations, for both parties that cooperation was of a marginal significance, and its deficiencies could easily have been compensated in alternative directions.

However, under the V.Putin administration (2000-2007), Moscow was able to raise to a new level its relations with both ASEAN and its individual members. This argument can be substantiated by the following examples.

First, Russia-ASEAN economic exchanges noticeably increased – in 2007 mutual trade rose to six billion (RIA Новости 2008b). More to the point, top Russian companies began to consider new possibilities of developing promising niches in the Southeast Asian markets. Among the range of examples, VimpelCom’s strategy towards Vietnam and Cambodia and Alfa Group Consortium’s readiness to invest around two billion dollars in Indonesian telecommunications are the most representative.

Second, arms transfers between Russia and the ASEAN states became impressive, even by the world standard. The most visible manifestation of this trend may have been the negotiations between Russia and Indonesia in September 2007, where a 1 billion worth military hardware deal was signed (VOA News 2007). Another significant development appears to have been the growth of stable and widespread interest in Russian arms and spare components among the buyers from Southeast Asia. The latter point was amply demonstrated during regular military equipment exhibitions – Defense and Security, Langkawi International Maritime and Airspace, IndoDefense etc.

Third, Russia significantly expanded and, which is much more important, diversified its presence in the Southeast Asian energy sector. As a result, not only the participation of Russian companies, but also Russia’s assistance the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam in developing their energy infrastructure became the subject of top-level negotiations. Within the aforementioned area the atomic energy warrants particular consideration. Thus, in 2006 Russia and Indonesia launched cooperation in peaceful use of atomic energy. A new impetus was given to the contacts between Moscow and Hanoi. A contract for building a nuclear research center, signed between Russia and Myanmar, is also a perfect example.

Fourth, cooperation in developing innovative technologies gained momentum. Take, for instance, the project “Flying Start” between Moscow and Jakarta aimed at orbiting an Indonesian civil satellite. Or the joint production of vaccines against bird flue with the participation of Russia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam. The expansion of contacts between Russia and Malaysia in space research, pharmaceuticals and informational technologies is another case in point.

Fifth, the rapid development of people-to-people contacts is also worth mentioning – especially after setting up visa-free or “relaxed-visa” regimes between Russia and most states of Southeast Asia.

Sixth and finally, the progress in relations between Russia and ASEAN as an international organization was really impressive. In fact, Russia considerably expanded and diversified the basis of this dialogue, the logical result of which was the first top-level ASEAN-Russia Summit held in December 2005. It may be convincingly argued that this event marked the zenith of V.Putin’s policy in Southeast Asia with significant strategic perspectives.

In the light of the above-mentioned, it seems correct to conclude that before D.Medvedev came to power Russia’s profile in Southeast Asia rose to growing prominence. Nevertheless, Moscow’s policy didn’t remain sufficiently balanced, as its economic component was far behind the political one.
Medvedev’s Policy: Steady Progress and Persisting Problems

A core premise of the Medvedev administration’s international policy has been to follow the course taken by the Putin team. The same is true for the Southeast Asian direction, in which Russia has been able to consolidate its achievements. Several points are noteworthy in this regard.

First, Moscow has strengthened its profile in relations with the individual countries of Southeast Asia. This trend is abundantly clear in four major spheres – arms deals, energy sector, innovative technologies and people-to-people contacts.

There seems to be sufficient evidence for arguing that the transfers of Russian arms to Southeast Asian partners have – and are likely to – become more substantive and diversified than they used to. Consider, for instance, the prospects of Moscow’s assistance to Hanoi in developing the Naval Forces and the coastal infrastructure, with a $3.2 billion deal expected to be signed (Газета.ru 2010). More to the point, there has been an apparent increase in the number of states to whom Russia sells arms. For example, in October 2008 Russia sold several Mi-171 helicopters to Thailand, which represented the first military trade deal between the two states. In addition, Russia and Brunei are considering a possibility to conclude an agreement on military cooperation, with prospective arms sales discussed during a meeting between President Medvedev and the Sultan and Prime Minister of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah in October 2009.

Another important development has been a continuing growth of Russia’s importance to Southeast Asian energy security. In fact, Russian companies which are planning to carry out projects in Southeast Asia are represented by the leaders of energy sector – Gazprom (oil and gas company), Inter RAO UES (a supplier of electric power), Rosatom (State Atomic Energy Corporation), to mention just a few. The projects under negotiations are no less impressive – Russian business is welcome to build TransASEAN pipeline, nuclear power plants, develop electric power stations network in a number of countries, assist the Southeast Asians in using energy-saving technologies etc. An event of profound significance has been the initiation of Senior Official Meetings on Energy at which the key figures from Russian and the ASEAN countries’ energy sectors participate. This dialogue platform held its first session in July 2010, concentrating on three spheres: a “traditional” energy sector, an alternative energy and a clean energy technology (Vietnam Plus 2010).

Significant progress in scientific and technological areas is also worth mentioning. The key existing and potential fields of cooperation include developing biotechnologies, creating and exploiting renewable sources of energy, improving E-Commerce, adopting natural disaster monitoring systems, mastering new e-learning technologies etc.

A case in point is also a rapid expansion of people-to-people contacts. It can be vividly exemplified by the growing inflow of Russian tourists to Southeast Asia, the total number of which rose to 509 thousand in 2009 as compared to 140 thousand in 2005. The increasing trend is highly likely to continue after the initiation of the Russian language courses for ASEAN tour operators (ASEAN Secretariat 2010b).

Second, Moscow has further enhanced and diversified the basis in dealing with ASEAN as an international organization. An event of high prominence was the establishment of Russia-ASEAN Center in Moscow State Institute of International Relations in June 2010 aimed mainly at promoting cultural, educational, scientific and other kinds of humanitarian exchanges. According to Professor V.Sumsky, Director of the Center, “relations between Russia and ASEAN members go beyond the interstate level, and are developing at the grassroots level” (The Voice of Russia 2010). The necessity to foster humanitarian contacts is obvious – as things nowadays are, the majority of Russians are completely ignorant about what ASEAN is, as well as many Indonesians don’t see any difference between Russia and the Soviet Union.

But the key event in Russia-ASEAN relations under the presidency of D.Medvedev has up to now been the Second summit at the top level held in October 2010. It seems correct to consider the very fact of the Hanoi Summit as a clear indication of progress since the first Russia-ASEAN summit was held five years ago. In summer 2011 another remarkable event – the 15th Anniversary of full-dialogue partnership – is to take place, which will undoubtedly provide additional impetus to Russia-ASEAN dialogue.
Against this background, there are strong reasons for suggesting that in the next few years ASEAN will be interested in strengthening ties with Russia. Three factors are key.

First, in 2010-2030 the Southeast Asian countries are expected to face severe problems with energy security. According to some estimates, ASEAN’s dependence on imported oil will rise to approximately 60-65 percent, as compared with the contemporary 35 percent (ADB 2009). Under these circumstances, the launch of the pipeline “Eastern Siberia – Pacific Ocean” and the development of technologies for natural gas liquation will significantly enhance the possibilities for Russian energy exports to Southeast Asia.

Second, the Southeast Asians might increase purchases of Russian arms. Current trends suggest that the strategic situation in the region is becoming more and more volatile urging the ASEAN countries to expand their military expenditures and arms procurements in order to cope with new uncertainties.

Third, the APEC Summit in Vladivostok in 2012 will play an important part. Currently both the ASEAN states and the Russian Federation share a number of concerns, including ecological challenges to sustainable development, lack of right balance between economic and social policies etc. There are strong grounds for expecting these issues to be carefully examined during the Summit, making positive contribution to strengthening ASEAN-Russia ties.

With these factors in view, it seems analytically correct to assume that the relations between Russia and ASEAN have considerable potential for further development. Nevertheless, at present Russia’s policy in Southeast Asia is having to cope with serious shortcomings. The most significant of them are in economic realm.

As things nowadays are, the trade volume between ASEAN and Russia is much lower than that between ASEAN and its other dialogue partners – mainly China, Japan and the US. For instance, in 2009 the two-way trade between the association and Russia was $6.7 billion, while between ASEAN and China, Japan and the US – $178.1, $160.8 and $149.5 billion respectively (ASEAN Secretariat 2010a). Under these circumstances, Russia lags far behind other partners in ASEAN’s order of priority – the more so since the vital component of the anti-crisis strategies adopted by many Southeast Asian countries is the development of free trade regimes and expansion of exports. No less important factor is Moscow’s absence in both financial cooperation schemes and major infrastructure projects in the region.

The aforementioned set of problems is compounded by the fact that Russian businessmen who enter the Southeast Asian markets seldom have person-to-person contacts with both their commercial vis-à-vis and heads of local administrations. As a result, Russian companies are facing considerable difficulties with obtaining licenses, running advertising campaigns etc.

But the key constrain is lack of strategic vision, as Moscow appears to remain in the process of specifying what exactly its interests in the region are and what benefits it is seeking to reap as the result of its efforts. The latest evidence for can be found in D.Medvedev’s speech at the Second Russia-ASEAN Summit as many proposals, pushed forward by the Russian President – such as to promote inter-civilisational and interfaith dialogue, to assist ASEAN countries ensure their food security, mentioning just a few (President of Russia, 2010), – appear to be more “the slogans of the day” than realistic plans to be implemented.

In sum, a very ambiguous overall picture can be build up from the foregoing analysis. On the one hand, Moscow has injected new energies in relations with both individual countries and ASEAN as an international organization, which can be rightfully considered as a qualitative step forward. On the other hand, however, the process of mutual rapprochement between Russia and ASEAN remains at its preliminary stages, and much work is left to be done in order to make the progress really substantial and impressive.
Future Challenges

It seems correct to forecast that the future of ASEAN-Russia relations will crucially depend on the processes which are likely shape the strategic landscape of Southeast Asia in the short- and mid-term perspective. The key of them are:

- The establishment of ASEAN Community;
- The evolution of multilateral dialogue platforms with ASEAN as the “driving force”;
- The unfolding competition between China and the US in Southeast Asia.

Each of the aforementioned developments is very likely to pose a challenging task to the association. Consequently, it is expedient to separately examine them and outline the repercussions for Russia – ASEAN relations.

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ASEAN COMMUNITY.** This project is supposed to have been set up by 2015 and consist of three pillars – ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN Political-Security Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

It can be convincingly argued that the first pillar – ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) – will inevitably present the association with a very difficult task. According to the project, AEC is supposed to be “a single market and production base” with free flow of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, infrastructure development and enhanced participation in global supply networks, to mention just a few of its components. (AEC Blueprint) In reality, however, the Southeast Asians appear to lack effective mechanisms for carrying out this task. Under these circumstances, it remains unclear how and by what means the association will surmount big obstacles to Southeast Asian integration, for instance, a widening gap in economic development between the individual countries, their differing economic priorities, poor transport infrastructure, non-coordination of standardization procedures etc.

In the next several years the outlined problems will be further exacerbated. The root cause lies in the growing trend towards an uneven distribution of benefits stemming from ASEAN’s increased cooperation with dialogue partners. This development will further sharpen intra-ASEAN contradictions, undermining its ability to implement an economic policy corresponding to the interests of all its members. At this juncture, “a single market and production base”, operating in 2015, will almost certainly remain rather a slogan than the existing reality.

In political-security and socio-cultural realms the situation is also far from overly optimistic. The key challenge which the Association is currently facing – how to “painlessly modify” its principles of cooperation, which is the necessary prerequisite for its success. Nevertheless, at the present time it is unclear whether or not ASEAN will be able to successfully cope with this task. The more so since the recently adopted ASEAN Charter, initially aimed at consolidating the interests of the Southeast Asian countries, revealed many inherent shortcomings can hardly be regarded as an effective means to foster the processes of regional integration.

**THE EVOLUTION OF MULTILATERAL DIALOGUE MECHANISMS DRIVEN BY ASEAN.** From ASEAN’s perspective, growing problems seem to be in the offing. This argument can be proved by the following examples.

First, the results of ARF’s activity during 16 years of its existence are mixed at best. Thus, the ARF meetings have been unable to influence on the key problems of both Southeast Asia and a wider geographical area. In fact, the Forum didn’t contribute to normalizing the situation in East Timor or solving the South China Sea territorial dispute or even improving relations between the ASEAN states. The same is true for Asia-Pacific – the Forum’s meetings didn’t render practical assistance to solving the North Korea’s nuclear issue or diminishing flagrant contradictions between the major Asia-Pacific powers – China and Japan, and China and the US.

Apart from it, in late 1990s – early 2000s ARF came to experience a severe “crisis of confidence” as the participating countries repeatedly stressed the necessity to resolve concrete problems rather than endlessly discuss them. Concurrent manifestations of this trend were seen in a

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1 The key multilateral dialogue platforms driven by ASEAN are the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asian Summit.
mounting sense of “meetings fatigue”, notable disappointment at overabundance of slogans and lack of action, which prevailed in the sentiments of ARF representatives.

Second, within the East Asian territorial domain the processes of multilateral cooperation seem to have taken the course which is not favorable to ASEAN’s interests – with far-reaching future consequences. The examples are as follows.

As things have been, since late-1990s the processes of East Asian regionalism have acquired two oppositely oriented features. The first marked a “narrowing” of the spectrum of the participants (ASEAN Plus Three) while the other – its “widening” (East Asian Summit). The logical result has been a serious clash of opinions regarding the key issues – for instance, which countries should form the core of the East Asian Community, what are the criteria for “East Asian Identity” etc. Concurrently, ASEAN’s dependence on its partners from Northeast Asia within the ASEAN Plus Three dialogue mechanism notably increased. It can be seen from the proportion of ASEAN’s and its partners’ contribution to the recently established emergency currency pool – 20% and 80% respectively (MFA RI 2009).

No less challenging development for the association has been the emergence of a new multilateral dialogue platform – Summit China – Japan – South Korea, which is very likely to exert the dominance influence upon the processes of East Asian regionalism. Against this background, it should be stressed that not long ago ASEAN’s position in the driving seat at the multilateral negotiations in East Asia was not only accepted, but also supported by big Northeast Asian powers.

Under these circumstances, in the next few years the association is very likely to be in the process of carving out a new niche in the emerging system of multilateral cooperation, though ASEAN’s spectrum of diplomatic maneuver is tending to narrow.

THE COMPETITION BETWEEN CHINA AND THE US FOR INFLUENCE UPON SOUTHEAST ASIA.

Current trends suggest that this process is slowly but steadily becoming more and more intense. Indeed, both Beijing and Washington are pursuing a broad and finely tuned strategy with a clear intention to increase their economic and political profile in the region. The major manifestations of this trend are outlined below.

It seems possible to agree with Professor V.Sumsky, who described the current China’s policy in Southeast Asia a “masterpiece of art” (Сумский 2007, 237-238). This position is well proved by the ways and means through which Beijing has been and is developing political, economic and military-to-military relations with both individual countries and ASEAN. One of the recent examples – amidst the world economic crisis China initiated a set of measures aimed at cushioning its traumatic effect upon ASEAN. Take, for instance, China-ASEAN investment cooperation fund with the capital of 10 billion dollars. Or a financial assistance to Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, a stimulation of the Mekong river cooperation projects, as well as an exploration of new possibilities for cooperation in a number of spheres very important to ASEAN (China View 2009). But the most remarkable event occurred in 1 January 2010, when China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, the world largest free trade zone with approximately 1,7 billion consumers, went into effect.

Trying to cope with the “rise of China”, the US under the Obama administration has considerably recalibrated its policy towards Southeast Asia. The initial impetus was provided during H.Clinton’s visit to Jakarta in February 2009 during which the new Secretary of State announced, among other things, Washington’s intention to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (CNN 2009). Later on ASEAN and the US convened Summits at the top level simultaneously pushing forward the idea to elevate their partnership to a strategic level (Whitehouse 2010). As a result, the leverage of Washington’s policy in the region – in spite of the remaining difficulties – has become much more efficient than it used to be.

The logical result of these developments has been a growth of instability in Southeast Asia. A most recent example germane to the discussion has been a new escalation of the South China Sea issue which took place in summer 2010. As things were, at the ARF meeting the American representative stressed that Washington has a “national interest” in maintaining stability in the South China Sea and “is prepared to facilitate initiatives and confidence-building measures”. This verbal demarche was followed by the carrier George Washington’s navigation through the South China Sea to Vietnam and the subsequent joint exercises by American and Vietnamese navies (Hawkings 2010).
This turn of events sparked off a sharp reaction from Beijing which considers the South China Sea as its ‘internal waters’.

Regarding the South China Sea issue two significant factors should be emphasized. First, for the association this problem has traditionally been complicated by the lack of unity among its individual members, and these contradictions are likely to grow – the more so since the idea of a new framework for solving the Spratly islands dispute instead of Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, signed by China and ASEAN in November 2002, has again been put forward (The Nation 2010). Second, current trends suggest that ASEAN is being forced to choose between Beijing and Washington – with all the negative consequences this scenario entails.

The trends presented above will have significant repercussions for ASEAN-Russia relations. Suffice it to say that the successful development of the ASEAN Community crucially depends on increased cooperation between ASEAN and its dialogue partners among which Russia is far from being one of the biggest. In this context much time and energy will be required to lend real substance to Russia-ASEAN dialogue. Apart from it, the necessity to secure its niche in the evolving system of multilateral cooperation will urge the association to reformulate its partnerships with the Asia-Pacific economic and political ‘heavyweights’, hence distracting resources from developing relations with the Russian Federation. Last but not least, the growth of China-US competition for influence – with the South China Sea as the likely ‘bone of contention’ – further curtails Russia’s freedom of maneuver in the region as arms deals with the claimant states in Southeast Asia and beyond – mainly, China, Vietnam and Malaysia, – will be a hostage to an evolving combination of factors currently impossible to forecast.

In other words, in the next several years Russia-ASEAN relations will be preoccupied with responding to very serious challenges. At this juncture considerable effort will be required to put the slogans, which have been and are going to be in overabundance, into practical reality.

### Conclusion

Any assessments of Russia’s policy under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, including that towards the countries of Southeast Asia and ASEAN, may be of a preliminary character. Nevertheless, a careful examination of major trends of and prospects for Russia-ASEAN relations leads to the following conclusion.

The foregoing analysis has amply revealed that the Medvedev administration has been able to further develop the potential of Russia’s relations with both individual Southeast Asian states and ASEAN as a multilateral body. Under these circumstances, the win-win cooperation in many promising areas will almost certainly receive a fresh impetus.

At the same time, however, the situation in the region does not appear to be developing in a direction favorable to Moscow’s interests. Against this background, the expected Russia’s participation in EAS and ASEM, though broadening the basis of Russia-ASEAN relations, is unlikely to give Moscow immediate positive feedback.

With this factor in view, the Russian Federation is will probably follow a “small-step” strategy aimed mainly at widening the spectrum of cooperation with the individual countries and ASEAN, strengthening ties in “traditional” spheres and unlocking the potential of new ones on a mutually beneficial basis. Whether and to what degree the results of this policy will meet the currently prevailing optimistic expectations remains an open-ended question.
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Under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev Russia has an excellent opportunity to raise its relations with the countries of Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to a qualitatively new level. Up to now, Moscow has been able to inject new energies in its Southeast Asian policy thus providing it with a firm basis for future progress. At the same time, however, Russia-ASEAN dialogue is currently facing not only unprecedented opportunities, but also very strong challenges with a considerable potential to grow in the years to come. Under these circumstances, the future of Russia-ASEAN relations remains uncertain since a great deal of time and effort will be required to translate the currently prevailing optimistic expectations into reality. Whether and to what extent this task will be effectively fulfilled remains an open-ended question.