

## THE ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) AND RUSSIA

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*Abstract:* For thirty years, Russia and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have been cooperating. Russia applied for OECD membership in 1996, but this question remained unresolved. The research papers provide a brief overview of developments in the long-standing cooperation and highlight the reasons for Russia's failure to join the organization by 2022. Till 2014, Russia's membership was largely contingent on social and economic performance. The OECD has greatly contributed to the country's progress in many fields. However, the character of the organization as a small club of like-minded states demands internalization of the values and views of the OECD member states. Therefore, the discord between Russia and some OECD members on geopolitical issues led to the suspension of the accession process in 2014 and the suspension of Russia's work in the OECD bodies in 2022. Nevertheless, since 2014, Russia and the OECD have worked closely together and even launched new projects. The research paper spotlights deep processes of rapprochement with the OECD till 2022, as exemplified by the spheres of responsible finance, sustainable infrastructure, and regional development, and estimates how feasible it was for the Russian government to revive Russia's ties with the OECD.

*Keywords:* International cooperation, OECD membership, accession process, reputation, values sharing, opinion-leadership, club model.

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## INTRODUCTION

Russia and the OECD have been cooperating for 30 years. In these years, Russia has become an enthusiastic partner of the Organization, a promoter of its standards, a supporter of its international programs, and even an initiator of projects at the OECD site, like the automatic exchange of financial information among countries. However, Russia did not become a member of the OECD. In view of the Russian president's decision on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the OECD Council of ministers announced reconsideration of all cooperation with Russia and, two weeks later, suspension of Russia's work in the OECD bodies (Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 2022, February 24; Statement of the OECD Council on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, 2022, February 24; and Statement from the OECD Secretary-General on further measures in response to Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, 2022, February 24).<sup>1</sup> In my research paper, I would like to observe the development of relations between Russia and the OECD by 2022 in order to estimate how close Russia was to the objective of acceding to the OECD and whether the OECD membership was actually achievable for Russia. For this purpose, the first part of the paper provides a brief retrospective on the rise of Russia-OECD cooperation from the formation of modern Russia in 1991 until 2014. The second part examines the meaning and weight of the OECD membership for Russia. The third part provides an overview of points of interaction between Russia and the OECD and highlights the process of internalization of OECD values in the Russian economy. The concluding remarks emphasize that OECD standards and best practices are available for implementation in all countries, both with and without OECD membership.

### RUSSIA AND THE OECD SINCE 1991

The cooperation between Russia and the OECD started with the transformation of Russia's social and economic system in 1991 from the Soviet command economy to a liberal one. Since 1991, Russia has become a state whose political and economic agenda could be aligned with the values of the

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<sup>1</sup> In the paper, the mention of the events related to Russia and Ukraine in 2022 seems inevitable since the events affected the cooperation between Russia and the OECD. However, it should be mentioned that the author does not consider the international legal qualification of the decisions made and their consequences.

OECD. In 1992, the newly established Centre for Cooperation with European Economies in Transition (CCET) launched a cooperative program with Russia and other newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. The cooperative program was designed to provide policy expertise on a wide range of issues. The Declaration on Cooperation between the OECD and Russia, signed on June 8, 1995, should have widened and intensified the cooperation with tasks of annual work programs (Russia and OECD documents on cooperation, 1994, June 8). From 1992 to 2000, the OECD issued a number of country-specific analytical reports, including three Economic Surveys in 1995, 1997, and 2000; several sectoral policy reviews of education, agriculture, environment, science and technology, and Russian policies; as well as joint research works, like the survey of Russian Energy Policies in cooperation with the International Energy Agency, an independent organization within the framework of the OECD (OECD and the Russian Federation Co-Operation 1992-2000, 2001, p. 22). Since 1985, the Soviet and then-Russian governments have substantially revised foreign policy to demonstrate their openness to international cooperation in many aspects: Russia opened the Northern Sea Route to navigation of foreign vessels in 1989; withdrew reservations to six human rights conventions on the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in 1989; acceded to Conventions of the Council of Europe in 1990-1991; submitted a request to join the GATT system in 1993; etc. In this context, it was not surprising that Russia made a formal application to become a new member of the OECD in May 1996 (OECD Secretary-General to discuss OECD-Russia partnership with Russian President, 2000, October 26). In May 1997, the OECD and Russia agreed to establish a Liaison Committee for monitoring and assessing the implementation of annual programs in Russia (Protocol on the establishment of the liaison committee between the Russian Federation and the OECD, 1997, June 12). For ten years, the Russian government conducted a range of reforms based on the OECD recommendations. In May 2007, the OECD Council at Ministerial Level adopted the Resolution on Enlargement and Enhanced Cooperation, which opened discussions on the accession process with five countries, including Russia (OECD Council Resolution on Enlargement and Enhanced Engagement. 2007, May 16). That year, the OECD Council approved the "Roadmap for the Accession of the Russian Federation to the OECD Convention" (Roadmap for the Accession of the Russian Federation to the OECD Convention, 2007, December 3). At that time, the Russian government began to implement the roadmap with considerable enthusiasm. One of the most remarkable achievements of Russia in this way was adherence to the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials

in International Business Transactions in 2012 (Russia's adherence to OECD instruments, 2022). Most Russian scholars highly appreciated this step not only as a development in the legal system but as a key to the improvement of social and economic relations in the market (Kashirkina, 2013, p. 78; Magomedova&Vylegzhanin, 2021). In August 2012, Russia became the 156<sup>th</sup> WTO member. This long-anticipated accession was also expected to facilitate the negotiations on the OECD membership of Russia (Russia's membership in the WTO will facilitate the country's accession to the OECD, 2011, November 15). During the visit to Moscow in February 2013, the Secretary-General of the OECD welcomed the efforts of the Russian government to accomplish the agreed working programs and to complete the accession process (Meeting with OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría, 2013, February 14). The last OECD Economic Survey of Russia in 2013 noted many positive aspects in economic indicators as well as policy developments (OECD, 2014). However, as the OECD Secretary-General underscored in January 2014, along with the economic achievements, Russia still needed to make its economy less dependent on fluctuations in world prices on natural resources and to focus on an equal, skills-based society to fulfill the potential for innovation and entrepreneurship (Russian economy growing but further reforms needed, says OECD, 2014, January 15; Remarks by Angel Gurría, 2014, January 15; Magomedova et al., 2020). Two months later, due to the alleged participation of Russia in the *coup d'état* in Ukraine, the OECD suspended the accession process of Russia to the OECD (Statement by the OECD regarding the status of the accession process with Russia & co-operation with Ukraine, 2014, March 13). The Russian government composedly accepted the OECD decision, having noted that Russia would continue the internal work according to the fixed agenda with the hope of a quicker revision of the decision (Russia does not abandon work on joining the OECD, 2014, March 13). At that time, in March 2014, Russia had already been adherent to 17 legal instruments of the OECD and engaged with 22 OECD bodies on a regular basis. Notably, Russia was engaged in 6 bodies as an associate member (with equal rights and obligations on par with OECD member-states), and in 16 bodies as a participant (with full engagement except for confidential discussions). In 2022, Russia was represented in 26 OECD bodies, engaged in the Participation Plans of 17 other OECD bodies, and implemented provisions of 27 OECD legal instruments (OECD, 2021a).<sup>2</sup> Not to mention other OECD projects Russia has

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<sup>2</sup> In March 2022 the information on participation of Russia in the OECD bodies and projects was deleted from this OECD source.

joined since 2014. Therefore, it is interesting to estimate how sensitive it was for Russia to stay in the role of partner, not a member of the OECD.

### **THE OECD MEMBERSHIP: RUSSIA'S MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN ACHIEVEMENT?**

The OECD membership has always been considered a kind of privilege – membership in the elite club. In this regard, the OECD challenges the conventional assumption about the participation of states in international organizations for functional motives. Membership in the OECD does not confer specific economic benefits, as it does in the WTO, nor does it impose special obligations on states, as it does in regional integrative associations of states. In fact, the OECD aims to support member and non-member-states equally. As the Convention on the OECD of 1960 (Article 1 (b) provides, the OECD promotes policies designed “to contribute to sound economic expansion in member as well as non-member countries in the process of economic development” (Convention on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1960). Therefore, Russia’s strive for the OECD membership is explained by the search for a particular status in the international arena (Davis, 2016, p. 1). Obviously, association with a particular group of states through membership in an international organization, forum, or interstate association brings about some reputational effects (Gray, 2013, p. 7). The OECD is regarded as a club of countries with outstanding achievements in the economy, science, and quality of life, which come together to share their best practices. Consequently, the recommendations of the OECD do not need additional justification to be regarded as valid measures (Daugirdas, 2019, p. 226). The OECD enjoys the authority of a worldwide recognized think-tank (Rautalin, Syväterä, Vento, 2021, p. 4). Furthermore, the membership of the OECD, as an organization with a clear system of values, standards, and promoted policies, reduces uncertainty about the business environment in a relevant country. For instance, Mexico’s accession to the OECD is often regarded as one of the main factors behind nearly quadrupled inflows of foreign direct investment into the country, mostly from other OECD countries (Hafner-Burton, Schneide, 2019, p. 244). As we can see, the status of a member is only a form, behind which states discern a particular value. The overall value of OECD membership is the opportunity to exercise opinion leadership in the international arena and thus advance and promote its ideas. However, the institutionalized promotion of ideas is possible only in association with like-minded states sharing common views and values (Drezner, 2007, p. 67).

These particularities of the OECD create two main implications for the OECD enlargement – *the increasing complexity of the accession process and a limit on the number of the OECD members*. As the authority of the OECD expertise grows, the organization has made its selection process more restrictive. The selective criteria are based on the demonstration of readiness and “commitment” of a state-candidate to internalize the OECD values. What was changed is the number of conditions and the structure of the accession process. The communiqué of the Council of the OECD of 1990 sets three main values: “pluralistic democracy, respect for human rights, and a competitive market economy” (OECD Communiqué, 1990, May 31). In 2004, the OECD adopted “A Strategy for Enlargement and Outreach”, which clarifies the key criteria for the eligibility of a candidate country. The set of four measures includes “like-mindedness”, “significant player”, “mutual benefit”, and “global considerations”. The accession process based on two simultaneous procedures of “positioning” and “assessment” was proposed to supersede the practice of *ad hoc* consideration of a state for accession (Soboru, 2004, p. 8). In 2011, the Vision Statement of the Ministerial Council Meeting dedicated to the OECD’s 50th Anniversary underscored the commitment of the OECD Members to “the values of democracy based on the rule of law and human rights, and adherence to open and transparent market-economy principles” (OECD, 2011). The latest view of the OECD on the eligibility criteria for candidate countries is presented in the Framework for the Consideration of Prospective Members of 2017, which provides a comprehensive system of “objective benchmarks for assessing each prospective member on its respective merits and on a case-by-case merits” (OECD, 2017, June 7-8, Para 21). The Framework is based on five pillars: state of readiness, including economic and public governance, ability, capacity and engagement, reach and impact; the country’s commitment to OECD values and membership obligations; key features of the institutional framework; key economic indicators; and relations with the OECD. None of these components can be prioritized: they should be performed simultaneously. Nonetheless, we can see the prevalence of qualitative criteria that is aligned with a necessary limit on the number of countries the OECD membership is accessible to. In 2004, the OECD explicitly declared that the organization’s enlargement should be limited to 40-45 members out of concern for the effectiveness of the organization’s functioning (OECD, 2004, Para 20). Fixation of this limit prevents the OECD from losing the advantages of a “small-club configuration” (Davis, 2016, p. 6). Within a small club, members can more easily elaborate on collective views and actions without the cost of settling different preferences. For this reason, the projects

that fail to be implemented on a global level are eventually performed on a smaller scale. This is the case of the 1997 OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, which was concluded among the OECD countries after the failed attempt at the United Nations (Drezner, 2007, p. 77). In fact, the presumption of “like-mindedness” is integrated both in the voting system based on the “mutual agreement of all the members” (Article 6 (1) of the 1960 Convention on the OECD) and in the working methods, such as the production of comparative statistics and policy analysis, thematic policy dialogue, country peer review, and multilateral rule-making. Therefore, a more strict accession process implies more discretion for existing member states to select new participants for their club. In the apt words of C. Davis, “existing members act as gatekeepers to exclude those who do not seem to fit into the club” (Davis, 2016, p. 4). The OECD Council Resolution on Enlargement of 2007 specifies the capacity of the Council to raise issues of a political nature during the discussions on the accession (OECD Council Resolution on Enlargement and Enhanced Engagement, 2007, May 16, Para. 2). Steven R. Ratner would call the OECD membership “partial” in the sense that it extends to states whose conduct conforms to certain views (Ratner, 2009, p. 137-138). The decision of the OECD in March 2014 was politically motivated, but in view of the character of the OECD membership, this is not a matter of bias towards Russia but a natural part of the assessment process. As the OECD Secretary-General explicitly marked in his speech at the Saint-Petersburg International Economic Forum in 2013, “[the accession] process is designed to ensure the convergence towards OECD standards and best practices”, so “clear evidence that Russia is moving in the right direction and is already far enough down the road” is that achieved changes are “irreversible” (Gurria, 2013, June 20). Such selectiveness, coupled with the initial openness of the OECD to non-member states, has led to a peculiar composition of the OECD membership. Since 1990, when the OECD set a course for enlargement, the share of non-European (by location) OECD members has changed from 24 to 31,6 percent, while the share of non-western (by cultural code) OECD members has increased from 8 percent to 18,4 percent. It is evident that recently accepted members from Latin America, such as Chile (2010), Colombia (2020), and Costa Rica (2021), might demonstrate worse economic results than some countries in the Asian-Pacific Region or the Middle East – but governance and economic performance here take second place. In January 2022, the OECD Council decided to open accession discussions with six candidates, including Argentina, Brazil, and Peru (OECD takes the first step in accession discussions with Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Peru, and Romania, 2022, January 25). Indeed, the

“wealth” of a country-candidate to the OECD is less important than its relations with the OECD members. At the very least, a new-comer is expected to demonstrate its firm adherence to the system of values shared among the OECD members. In this regard, the decision of the OECD in 2014 to “postpone activities related to the accession process of Russia” was a simple statement: Russia has not internalized the values of the OECD member states. Therefore, such a conclusion seemed acheless for Russia and did not hamper Russia’s current internal work. On the contrary, this refusal to consider Russia as a prospective member of the OECD in the near future incited Russia to intensify the efforts which could persuade the OECD countries to review their judgments on Russia.

#### **THE OECD AND RUSSIA SINCE 2014: SUSPENDED ACCESSION - NOT SUSPENDED EFFORTS**

Since 2014, Russia has not relaxed its efforts to implement the OECD standards and policies. According to the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia, in 2017, Russia adopted five federal laws in the fields of industry, information security, healthcare, finance, consumer and mortgage lending in line with the best practices of the OECD countries (Russia is ready to accede to the OECD, 2018, June 18). In particular, it is worth noting the cooperation between Russia and the OECD through the G20 platform in the taxation sphere. In 2013, the G20 forum under Russia’s presidency initiated the BEPS project (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Action Plan), which by 2022 will involve 141 countries and jurisdictions (OECD, 2022a). In May 2016, Russia joined the OECD’s Common Reporting Standard, having signed the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on the automatic exchange of information (MCAA AEOI). In 2017, Russia signed the multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on the Exchange of Country-by-Country Reports (CbC MCAA). As of October 2021, Russia has been exchanging country-by-country reports on the revenues of multinational enterprises with 62 jurisdictions (receiving data from the other 14 jurisdictions on a unilateral basis) (OECD, 2022b). The relevant amendments were implemented in the tax legislation (Levashenko, Koval, 2018, p. 71). Since 2014, Russia has broadened its participation in the OECD bodies and joined, in particular, the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation Governing Board, the Governing Board of the Program for International Student Assessment, the Regulatory Policy Committee, and the Corporate Governance Committee. Furthermore, Russia has engaged in new projects within the technical interaction with the OECD (OECD, 2021a). Russia

regularly participated in the economic surveys of the OECD “Going for growth” and “The Economic Outlook”. In 2018, Russia and the OECD launched a project on developing a Good Laboratory Practices (GLP) system. In 2019, Moscow City entered the OECD Program on a Territorial Approach to the SDG. In 2019, the OECD conducted a series of seminars on Russia’s participation in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) for teachers from across the country. Since 2019, Russian cities have been participating in the OECD’s work on the National Urban Policy Review for Russia. In the period 2020-2021, Center Russia-OECD RANEPa, together with the VEB.RF (national financial institution for development), as well as the DOM.RF (institution for financing development in the field of housing), conducted three online missions with the OECD representatives in which Russian public officials and experts from the academic community participated (OECD Online-Mission, 2020). In regulatory terms, the cooperation between the OECD and Russia at the expert level in the last 8 years has been based on the Plan on interaction with the OECD, the Plan of Participation of Russia’s public officials in the OECD bodies’ work, and the Plan on legislative work for harmonization of Russia’s normative system in conformity with the OECD rules. These documents are adopted on a biennial basis, taking into account the results of the previous period. The latest biennial plan of interaction for the period 2021-2022 includes 128 goals for cooperation with 46 committees and working groups of the OECD. On the basis of comparing the document with the previous plan, which included 115 goals in the work with 33 OECD bodies, one could conclude the good performance of the task on the intensification of cooperation between Russia and the OECD. However, the detailed comparative analysis might contribute to the skepticism of Russian scholars on the relevance of Russia’s input to the rapprochement with the OECD (Bobrenko, Shakirov, 2021, p. 28-29). In the current plan, the share of goals of high importance, such as the implementation of the OECD standards in the legislation or realization of the OECD projects in Russia, constitutes only 9 percent, whereas the major part (52 percent) accounts for the goals of moderate importance, such as the provision of data to the OECD, development of recommendations on the integration of the OECD best practices, presentation of positions, and commentaries to the OECD. The previous plan had twice as many high-impact goals – 18 percent (Bobrenko, Shakirov, 2021, p. 30). At the same time, these findings from the formalist analysis of normative sources do not provide a comprehensive picture of Russia’s development on the way to the OECD. As noted above, the rapprochement

of a candidate country with the OECD is a matter of internalized values and shared views with the OECD members. Therefore, it is worth focusing on shifts and developments in Russia's social and economic environment. The last three years are marked by a visible trend of integration of responsible finance standards into the Russian financial market. In the autumn of 2021, Russia adopted a *national taxonomy of sustainable projects*, which includes the criteria for sustainable development projects and the requirements applicable in the project verification (Resolution of the Russian Government, 2021, September 21). The provisions on the requirements for the verification process clearly indicate that they are elaborated in line with the OECD standards for sustainable development, including the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (Para. 1). It should be noted that Russia's Taxonomy takes account of the best international practices and standards, including those of the OECD, Green/ Social/ Sustainable Bond Principles of the International Capital Market Association, standards of the Climate Bonds Initiative, and practices of the members of the International Development Finance Club (VEB.RF, 2022a). Therefore, Russia joined a group of states which have already introduced into national legislation rules of responsible project financing, like Japan, France, and the Netherlands. The OECD considers a taxonomy as a policy lever to address the investment gap and to scale-up sustainable investment on par with such tools as climate and clean energy policies, carbon pricing and fossil fuel subsidy reform, development of markets for green financial products, climate risk disclosure, etc. (OECD, 2020, p. 17). In this regard, taxonomy serves as an impetus for national financial institutions to re-design their corporate policies for the integration of sustainable aspects. For instance, the VEB.RF implements the Principles of Responsible Financing, approved by the BRICS Inter-Bank Cooperation Mechanism under Russia's presidency in 2020 (Memorandum of BRICS DFIs Principles for Responsible Financing approved by the BRICS Inter-Bank Cooperation Mechanism, 2020, November 15). The Guidelines for implementing the Principles are largely based on the OECD Due Diligence standards (OECD, 2022c). In view of Russia's geographic and economic peculiarities, as a vast territory covering several climate zones, along with a low density of population and a low level of urbanization, the infrastructure is a particularly sensitive sphere in Russia. To facilitate the development of *sustainable infrastructure*, the VEB.RF devised the National System of Assessment and Certification of Infrastructure Projects on the Principles of Quality Infrastructure Investments, approved by G20 countries in 2019 at the forum in Osaka (VEB.RF, 2022b). The system adopts the best international practices for infrastructure assessment, like Envision,

CEEQUAL, and Infrastructure Sustainability (VEB.RF, 2019). The methodology is based on three main pillars, such as economy and governance, quality of life, environment, and climate (VEB.RF, 2021). The certification framework is expected to facilitate the integration of environmental considerations into infrastructure project planning and thereby accelerate private investment in infrastructure projects. At the moment, the OECD sets a high value on sustainable infrastructure, providing strong expert support in this field (OECD, 2021b). Russia works hard at eliminating regional disparities and enhancing *the quality of life* across the country. In 2021, Russia presented the City Life Index, an open information-analytical platform based on statistical data from 115 Russian cities. The City Life Index for each of the covered cities is measured with more than 200 indicators, including indicators from the OECD databases, such as the Better Life Index and Regional Well-Being. Thus, the results of Russian cities in 12 dimensions can be compared with the performances of cities in the OECD countries on the basis of data from relevant OECD databases. This project not only facilitates monitoring of urban development for policy-makers but enhances the visibility of Russian cities in the world (City Life Index, 2022). Admittedly, regional administration and the arrangement of urban life in Russia differ markedly from the practices of most OECD members. The draft of the OECD National Urban Policy Review in Russia covers such particularities as the development of single-industry towns supported by the Monocities Development Fund, the development of urban agglomerations different from functional urban areas as determined in the OECD methodology, the experience of centralized training of regional policy-makers, etc. These examples demonstrate that the infusion of the OECD standards and values into Russia's business environment, financial markets, and people's lives is much deeper than can be reflected in rough plans of cooperation. In this regard, the Russian Prime Minister's order to the government to revive links with the OECD in March 2020 was not just an optimistic ambition but a reasoned step within the consistent policy of rapprochement with the OECD (Bloomberg, 2020, March 3).

## CONCLUSIONS

For 30 years, Russia has made many steps towards the OECD, which were warmly welcomed by the OECD members. However, the taken measures were insufficient (either in scope, quality or quantity) to persuade the OECD members that Russia is their true like-minded partner not only

in matters of national policies but in questions of intergovernmental relations. Nonetheless, it should be highlighted that the OECD standards, recommendations, and tools are addressed not only to public authorities but to all stakeholders. Therefore, the efforts made by Russian public officials, private entities, non-profit organizations, and independent experts were not in vain. With or without OECD membership, those who appreciate the expertise of the OECD and its values continue to implement international standards and best national practices. As a result, we can say that the goal of generating interest and motivation among Russians for international knowledge exchange and the adaptation of best practices in their own activities has already been met.

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