

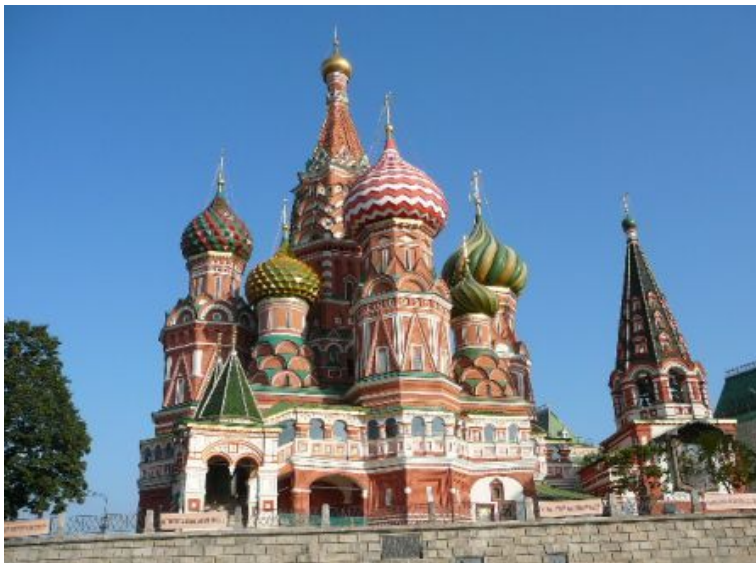
Visit to Moscow 13-17 September 2006

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I was invited to Moscow by Professor Victor Sergeev, who is our contact with the MGIMO exchange. The object of the visit was to give a lecture on Regional Policy in the European Union to the members of a research project looking at regional development in the area of the Moscow/St Petersburg corridor. Why should such a topic be interesting to Russian scholars? Firstly, although the Russian Federation has recently experienced a surge of growth, its effects have not percolated far outside Moscow and, to a lesser extent, St. Petersburg. Secondly, the rise in energy prices has contributed to creating a sizeable fund at the disposal of the government, for which it has yet to find an outlet.



My answer was that the EU could point to plenty of directions to spend money, but that monetary flows themselves would do little to stimulate growth in the absence of more fundamental institutional reforms. The project members thought my lecture was depressing, but it was nothing to listening to their presentations. I was left with the impression that in the regions most of the drawbacks of the Soviet system had survived, but without any drive or direction.



I did find time to look around the centre. I have been in Moscow on and off since the fall of Communism, and I am always impressed by visible improvement of the city each visit. It is true that some modern building or restoration has been in crass bad taste, but the streets are visibly better maintained and many monuments are now being restored (and not just the main ones!). Last time I was here, Saint Basil's Cathedral was partly covered in scaffolding, but now it was visible in all its splendour. Unfortunately, it was now the turn of the Kremlin to be closed for restoration.



During such visits you renew old friendships, talk about future research cooperation and fine-tune the modalities of the exchange. This year we might have two students going to Moscow to collect thesis materials, so it was important to streamline our arrangements. Unfortunately, their study room won't be quite like the one shown above!