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Russian special economic zones

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The role of Russia in the world economy has always been the one of a resource base. Russia has experienced strong economic growth over the past decade, but this has mainly been due to the high world market prices of raw materials instead of a success in structural reform of her economy. Unfortunately Russia still has not been able to abandon its role as a mere commodity exporter, and still remains regarded mostly as everything else but a knowledge-based society.

Russia is a vast country with huge regional differences. Its population is mostly concentrated in big cities with long distances between them. Not only population, but also the level of economic activity, business and investments, are unevenly spread over the country. The cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg with their surrounding regions have been the centres of economic growth and development and therefore have also been the main attractions for foreign investors. The rest of the country has more or less been left out of that development.

To make economic well-being distributed more evenly over the country, Russia has founded altogether 13 special economic zones aiming at boosting the economies of the otherwise rather backward regions. Special economic zones (often referred to as duty-free zones, export-processing or high technology zones, or free trade areas) exist in more than eighty countries (Schweinberger 2003, 619). The success of especially the Chinese special economic zones has encouraged other countries to try to use SEZs to gain economic growth and to attract foreign investment.

The first Russian special economic were so-called tourist-recreational zones. However, as the Russian economy is heavily dependent on its natural resources, in order to facilitate Russia's transformation from a resource base to a more technology-innovative economy, the decision was made in the late 2005 to set up the six new special economic zones. The purpose of creating the SEZ was to develop processing industries, high technology industries and transport infrastructure (for example the automobile industry, equipment

manufacturing, chemical production, the pharmaceutical industry and the computer industry). (Malakha 2006, 43.)

The six new special economic zones were decided to be set up. All the six are shown in the picture below.

Figure 1 The map of the Russian Federation showing the six special economic zones set up by the federal law in 2005 (<http://www.admlr.lipetsk.ru/eng/sez/sez-rf.php>)



The six new special economic zones were located as follows and as can be seen from the picture above. One zone is in Saint Petersburg in the North-Western federal district. Two zones, Zelenograd and Dubna, belong to the Moscow region. The SEZ Lipetsk is located in Lipetsk region, approximately 400 km south-east from Moscow. Additionally, one of the special economic zones was set up in Alabuga, approximately 1000 km East from Moscow, in the Republic of Tatarstan. The sixth zone was decided to be set up in Southern Siberia, in the Tomsk region.

In order to ensure the positive impact on the technological development of Russia, the six new zones were given different types of production focuses. The law on SEZs provides two types of SEZs: technical research and implementation zones for scientific projects and industrial production zones to develop industrial production (Malakha 2006, 43). The division of the task between the six zones is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The six new special economic zones with location, type and focus.
(information collected from www.rosoez.ru and www.rosez.ru)

SEZ	Region	Type	Focus
Saint Petersburg	The city of Saint Petersburg	technological-innovative	production of analytical instruments
Dubna	Moscow region	technological-innovative	information and nuclear -physical technologies
Zelenograd	Moscow region	technological-innovative	micro- and nanoelectronics
Tomsk	Tomsk region Southern Siberia	technological-innovative	industrial electronics and biotechnologies
Lipetsk	Lipetsk region	industrial-manufacturing	domestic and industry appliances
Alabuga	Tatarstan	industrial-manufacturing	components for the automotive industry, chemical industry

Consequently, as seen in the table above, four of the zones - St. Petersburg, Tomsk, Zelenograd and Dubna – were determined to concentrate on technologically-innovative production. On the contrary, the remaining two new zones - Alabuga and Lipetsk - were set up to have their focus on industry production. It should be emphasised that not all activities are allowed on an SEZ's property, such as minerals extraction and metallurgical production (Malakha 2006, 43).

1.2 The purpose of the study

The six new special economic zones of Russia have already been a subject for a couple of quite recent researches carried out by the Pan European Institute. However, to distinguish

this particular study from the earlier ones the focus of this research will be on taking a look at how the six SEZs are discussed in the Russian media, if discussed at all. What was especially in the interests of the researchers was to find out by following the public discussion was to find out if the special economic zones zones are taken seriously as means to successfully restructure the Russian economy, or are they considered perhaps only a global trend in which Russia has to take part.

In other words, the aim was to investigate the common attitude towards the SEZs, if such exists. This is of course an issue to which direct answers cannot be found, but the by picking hints from the public discussion some conclusions can be made.

Even though the aim of this paper is not to directly describe and evaluate the current state of each special economic zone in question, the first chapter is used for a quick look at what is going on in each of the special economic zones. Chapter 2 will introduce the six zones, by simultaneously updating what has been going on in the zones. What was found discussed more widely in public is described in Chapters 3. Chapter 4 concludes.

2 The six new special economic zones

The aim of this chapter is to take a look at the current state of each of the special economic zones. The Table 2 below was being constructed to summarise some of the most important pieces of information concerning the zones. From it can be seen the absolute number of residents in December 2008. In addition, the attractiveness of the zones can in a way be seen in the increase in the number of residents during the past 6 months. Also the fact that some SEZs have not even started to run their operations yet is taken into account in the form of showing the date when the SEZ residents in question did - or will - start to operate.

Table 2. Current state of the SEZs
(data collected from www.rosez.ru and www.rosoez.ru)

SEZ	Residents December 2008	Increase in number of residents during the past 6 months	Opening date
Saint Petersburg	26	0	2009-2010
Dubna	31	6	2008
Zelenograd	11	0	2008-2009
Tomsk	36	11	Oct. 2008
Lipetsk	13	4	Jan. 2008
Alabuga	7	0	Nov. 2007

As it can be seen from the table above, the special economic zones of Saint Petersburg, Dubna, Zelenograd, Tomsk, Lipetsk and Alabuga vary in the number of residents, the biggest difference being between the SEZ in Tomsk and the SEZ in Alabuga in Tatarstan. It can also be seen that two of the zones have not even started to operate yet.

Next each zone is discussed separately in more detail. The technologically-innovative zones are discussed first, followed by the industrial-manufacturing type zones.

2.1 The technologically-innovative zones

The special economic zone in *Saint Petersburg* is of technologically-innovative type. It consists of two separate areas, Noiford in the South and Novo-Orlovskaya in the North, both of which will be officially opened in 2009-2010. Saint Petersburg special economic zone focuses on the production and development on information technology, products of the medical industry, and production of analytical instruments. (www.rosoez.ru; www.rosez.ru) From the table above it can be seen that the Saint Petersburg special economic zone has 26 residents by December 2008. Unlike in the case of other zones, its number of residents has not increased at all during the period of the research.

Table 3. The development plan of the Saint Petersburg SEZ
(adapted from www.rosoez.ru)

Year	Number of residents	Jobs created
2007	4	700
2008	10	2600
2009	35	3500
2010	70	7000

As it can be seen, the SEZ Saint Petersburg is still quite far from its goal, when it comes to for example number of officially registered residents. In slightly more than one year onwards, 2010, the number of residents should increase by 46 in order to meet the target number. Furthermore, as the residents still have no actual operations yet in the area of the special economic zone (Zashev 2008, 27), the target number of employed people of 3500 in 2009, or even 7000 in 2010, seems quite unrealistic.

The special economic zone in *Tomsk* in Southern Siberia focuses on medical biotechnology, industrial biotechnology, agricultural biotechnology, IT and electronics, nuclear power and nanotechnology. (www.rosoez.ru; www.rosez.ru) It started to operate as recently as in October 2008 (Томскую ОЭЗ откроют к инновационному форуму Sept. 13, 2008). The technological-innovative SEZ in Tomsk in Siberia is one of the biggest special economic zones in terms of number of residents. It has 36 registered residents and the number has grown by 11 during the period of the research. When one looks at the

increase in number of residents in the Tomsk SEZ, it could be argued that it is likely to be considered rather attractive from the investor's point of view.

However, It has been stated that the SEZ in Tomsk would become more attractive for example for companies from Novosibirsk technopark, if a certain amendment to the law on SEZ is added. This amendment would allow serial production also within the technologically-innovative zone. According to several sources, this would attract more investors and potential residents. ("Технопарк сближают с зоной", Коммерсантъ новосибирск May 6, 2008).

This kind of a law amendment would of course boost the SEZ in its activity. This kind of production would also be the product of the "technologically-innovative process", and theoretically it has already contributed to the increase of the level of technological production. But on the other hand it could be asked whether it still then serves its original goal of helping the economy in its structural transformation, if the activity can be changed from the originally ordered one.

According to the article *"Бауман Инновейшенс предложила Томску построить промышленные парки"* in Novosibirsk Kommersant of August 16 2008, some companies have complained that their operations in Tomsk have been hindered by insufficient land plots and/or production facilities and/or lack of qualified workforce. From one particular company it has been suggested that four production parks should be set up Tomsk SEZ. These would include production of chemicals, technological production and food production. The fourth one would serve as some kind of a logistics centre. The vice governor of the Tomsk region, however, has been of the opinion that those parks would compete of residents with the SEZ and therefore would never attract enough companies. ("Бауман Инновейшенс предложила Томску построить промышленные парки", Коммерсантъ новосибирск Aug. 16, 2008.)

In addition to increasing number of residents, co-operation between the Tomsk SEZ and its neighbouring Novosibirsk technopark has been rather close. It was said that the two cities have understood the importance of co-operating instead of competing (Технопарк сближают с зоной May 6, 2008). The activities of the two cities are complementing each

other, as Novosibirsk has the scientific potential and Tomsk SEZ could act as a mean of commercializing this. In addition, this kind of co-operation may later be extended to Kemerovo and Tyumen after their technoparks have been established. (Технопарк сближают с зоной May 6, 2008).

The third technologically innovative special economic zone is *Zelenograd* located in the Moscow region. It also of technologically-innovative type and concentrates on IT and nanotechnology (www.rosuez.ru; www.rosez.ru). It has not started its operations yet, and also has not attracted any new residents during the second half of 2008.

Thus the Zelenograd SEZ economy has not been really lively. In an interview published at the Federal Agency for Governing Special Economic Zones web page, the director of the Zelenograd SEZ, Mr. Kovalev, gave an explanation for the small number of residents. He pointed out that they do not have a problem with the number of potential residents, but with the quality of them. The business plans have to match the task of the SEZ. As far as the number of residents is concerned, regardless of the current situation, the goals are set high. The capacity of the Zelenograd SEZ will be as much as 200 residents. According to Kovalev, as the construction work is still in process there is no sense in attracting new residents. This is due to the fact that once officially registered in the special economic zone they should have facilities to operate in but at the moment the Zelenograd SEZ has nothing to offer them. (Особая экономическая зона: кризис не помешает, <http://www.rosuez.ru/news/media/1810013>, Dec 18, 2008).

The last one of the technologically-innovative zones is the special economic zone in the city of *Dubna*. It is located in the Moscow region, and is concentrating on nanotechnology in its production (www.rosuez.ru; www.rosez.ru). It has attracted as many as 31 residents, six of which have joined during the past six months of 2008. From the Table 4 planned number of residents can be seen.

Table 4. The development plan of the Dubna SEZ (adapted from www.rosoez.ru)

Number of residents	
end of 2007	12
end of 2008	25
end of 2009	40
end of 2010	80

As it can be seen, at least with its 31 residents in the end of 2008 the Dubna special economic zone has more than fulfilled its goal so far. Furthermore, it has lately been announced that the companies in the Dubna SEZ that the tax on profit will be reduced by further 4 % (Резиденты в ОЭЗ в Московкой области получили дополнительные льготы, Sept. 16, 2008, www. Rosez.ru/?news_id=2925.) This naturally further increases the attractiveness of the Dubna special economic zone.

2.2 The industrial-manufacturing zones

The industrial-manufacturing oriented special economic zone in *Lipetsk* has its focus on metallurgy, production of industrial and home appliances and products for the construction industry (www.rosoez.ru; www.rosez.ru). It was the second one of the new the SEZs to start operating. After the opening in the beginning of 2008 it has attracted 13 residents, of which 4 can be considered to be recently joined. Already in the beginning 3 of the first residents were of foreign origin (Special Economic Zone is opened in Russia, Jan 28, 2008).

The last new special economic zone, *Alabuga*, is located in Tatarstan republic. is also of industrial-manufacturing type and is responsible for building components and spare parts for the automotive industry, as well as chemical products. (www.rosoez.ru; www.rosez.ru). It was the first of the six new ones to open in November 2007. However, at the moment it remains the smallest SEZ in number of residents, having only 7 companies registered in it, and not having any new residents signing in for the past six months.

3 General public discussion related to the special economic zones in the Russian media

Whereas in Chapter 2 a quick look was taken at the special economic zones of Saint Petersburg, Tomsk, Zelenograd, Dubna, Lipetsk and Alabuga separately. In this chapter it is described how the issue of special economic zones in general have been discussed in the Russian media. The issues discussed have by no means been specially chosen by the researchers but are simply the issues that have been on the agenda during the research period.

3.1 *Improved reputation of the special economic zones*

In Russia in the 1990s special economic zones were considered as centres of criminal activity and corruption. Until the 21st century the concept of a SEZ had a controversial, or even notorious reputation. They were set up by the Chinese model and were expected to bring in foreign investment and know-how, and were expected to result in increasing economic growth and well-being of the region. However, uncertainty of their legislation made them exactly the opposite of the usual assumption of a special economic zone. The Russian SEZs in the 1990s were far from islands of legal stability and security in an otherwise turbulent business environment. (Zashev 2008, 6.) As stated more straight by Vedomosti in July 2008 Vladimir Aleksandrovich Mau, the rector of The Academy of National Economy under the Government of the Russian Federation, a decade ago the special economic zones appeared mainly mere centres of corruption and criminal activity.

In his article Mr. Mau discussed how in his opinion corruption has practically disappeared from special economic zones as a consequence of founding of the new zones. He emphasises that as corruption is one of the main themes in Russian politics, and among the most difficult problems to solve, and that there is no simple remedy for it. Therefore he stresses that the eradication of it requires a profound institutional change, in other words, total change in the rules of the game. (Локальный опыт, Vedomosti July 7, 2008).

What Mau praises about the new special economic zones is the fact that according to him, they can perhaps be blamed of inadequate output, slow development, or only slight

contribution to economic growth, but they can not be blamed of being corrupt. This is because the organisation of the SEZs is based on such principles that according to Mau, strictly decrease the attractiveness, and possibilities, to exploit the zone for illegal purposes. (Vedomosti July 9, 2008.) These principles are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5. The factors contributing to decreased level of corruption in the new special economic zones, as seen by Mau (Vedomosti July 9, 2008).

<u>Factors decreasing the level of corruption in the SEZs</u>
Zones organised under the Federal Law
Open competition for becoming a resident
Finance from both federal and municipal governments
Goals of the SEZs clearly on attracting investors
Decreasing role of tax benefits in attracting investors
The surface area of SEZs restricted

Above can be seen the six factors which according to Mau lower the level of corruption in the SEZs. Firstly, the zones are now organised under federal law in order to contribute to the overall growth instead of only maximising the benefit of an individual company. Secondly, the regions eventually chosen to become host regions have to compete openly for earning the place among other regions. Naturally lobbying may take place, but it has been made more difficult as the decision making group consists of a wide range on independent specialists. Thirdly, the SEZs are financed by the federal and municipal governments together; thus both sides have to consider carefully whether they really need this institution or not. (Vedomosti July 9, 2008.) A fourth factor which from Mau's point of view decreases corruption is the fact that the goals and objectives are more clearly stated than they used to be until the year 2000. Nowadays the emphasis is clearly on attracting new investments instead of healing depression. This results in more powerful and economically viable regions ending up as hosts for SEZ. In these regions the SEZ becomes an important, but not critically, part of the region's economic growth and development. Thus the risk of increasing illegal activity decreases. (Vedomosti July 9, 2008.) Fifthly, Mau points out that the attractiveness of a SEZ is not and also never should be based on only tax benefits, but more importantly on lowering entry barriers to the market and providing a proper infrastructure. A sixth factor that also is said to have been

reduced corruption is that the physical boundaries of the new SEZs are determined. Only companies registered in the SEZ can become residents and get the benefits offered. (Vedomosti July 9, 2008.)

It is not only Mau who is of the opinion that the new special economic zones are less corrupt than their precursors. It has been stated that it holds true that a decade ago special economic zones were used mostly for running companies that existed only on paper only in order to gain tax benefits. Those companies did not even have any physical production facilities. It is admitted that nowadays in the case of the six new special economic zones already the legislation, its implementation and control mechanisms are so well organised that there is no threat of the zones being misused for illegal practises as was done in the past. (“Зоны особого внимания” РБК Daily, Sept. 25, 2008.)

However, it appears that due to the history of poorly managed special economic zones in the 1990s the assumption that SEZs are nothing but financial black holes still sometimes remains. Special economic zones are still accused of being only a way to escape from paying taxes without further benefiting the host region. They have been referred to as financial "black holes", where the money only disappears. It was stated that the Magadan region had tax and customs benefits until the year 2007 without resulting in any improvement in the region's economy. (“Зоны особого внимания” РБК Daily, Sept. 25, 2008.) From one point of view in order to avoid the zones becoming only a way to avoid paying taxes, the operations of the zones should be kept under tighter control. (“Зоны особого внимания” РБК Daily, Sept. 25, 2008). However, this would in turn make it again more and not less bureaucratic for companies to operate in special economic zones, and would decrease the attractiveness of the region.

On the contrary, it has to be remembered that direct results from Saint Petersburg, Dubna, Zelenograd, Tomsk, Lipetsk or Alabuga have not yet been gained (“Зоны особого внимания” Sept. 25; “Локальный опыт” July 7). Therefore at this point it is difficult to address whether the tax benefit that the host region gives to its residents is smaller than the amount by which a company contributes to the economic growth and development of the region. (“Зоны особого внимания” РБК Daily, Sept. 25, 2008.)

3.2 Zones of special attention

During the research period the six lately set up special economic zones in Saint Petersburg, Zelenograd, Dubna, Lipetsk, Tomsk and in Alabuga cannot be considered widely discussed in the Russian media. However, issues though indirectly linked to SEZs were seen more often.

Economic growth and development not only in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, but especially in the regions seems to be a hot potato in Russia. It has been realised that economic well-being is currently so unevenly distributed over the country that some measures should be taken in order to achieve at least slightly more even distribution of wealth between the economic centres and the “forgotten regions”. The entire Russian economy could and should be strengthened by strengthening the economies of its regions (“Региональное развитие России”, РБК Daily, Sept. 18, 2008; “Зона особого внимания” РБК Daily, Oct. 1, 2008). It is made very clear that the economic state of the regions needs to be improved. For example, it has been said about the Far Eastern Federal District that “without its economic development Russia can as well lose it” (“Зона особого внимания” РБК Daily, Oct. 1, 2008).

In the context of regional development the concept of special economic zone is often mentioned. The regions which are in need of an economic boost have been referred to as being “зоны особого внимания”, zones of special attention. Such regions are located mostly in the already mentioned Far Eastern Federal District. In September 2008 President Medvedev promised that more serious effort will be put on the economic growth and development of the Far East. The possibility of the possibility of setting up SEZs in Magadan region, Chukotka, Kamchatka and in Korjakij (“Зоны особого внимания” РБК Daily, Sept. 25, 2008).

In addition, the idea of a special economic zone has even been mentioned when discussing Abhasia’s future. In an article in Vedomosti it was discussed that after recognising Abhasia’s independence, Russia could assist in its political stabilisation and economic recovery, and by doing so could gain an international acceptance for the recognition. Different ways to make the economy of Abhasia flourish were speculated, and

one of the suggestions was a manufacturing-oriented special economic zone, with the same kind of benefits as offered in the Kaliningrad region. This would attract also small and medium size business to Abhasia, naturally given that the overall situation normalizes first. (“Три пути для Абхазии” Vedomosti, Sept.19, 2008.) Thus in some cases the attitude is rather negative and trust on SEZs is low, but on the other hand, sometimes high expectations seem be put on them, as in the case of introducing such a regime in Abhasia.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to take a look at how the six new special economic zones in Saint Petersburg, Dubna, Zelenograd, Tomsk, Lipetsk and Alabuga are discussed in public in Russia. The aim was to find out, if possible, hints of whether the special economic zones are were set up just to make it appear as if the Russians are really willing to transform from a commodity exporter to a more high-tech producer, or have the zones been set up with real honest ambitions to increase the country's level of technology production and innovation capacity, and bring in the foreign technology and know-how.

When taking a look at how the topic has been discussed in public, the messages are rather controversial. On one hand the current special economic zones are being praised of cleaning the reputation of the regimes that was spoilt in the 1990s as most SEZs were nothing more than crossroads of corruption. Corruption is said to have been eliminated from the current special economic zones. On the other hand, the old belief has still not totally disappeared; although it has been agreed that the new SEZ have the means to keep illegal activity out of the zones, sometimes they are still referred to as "financial black holes", in which all the money invested gets lost without any returns. However, given the improvements in the organisation and governing of the current SEZs, it seems that the aim has been to really assist in regional development and structural transformation of the economy.

On the contrary, at times it seems that the opportunity of setting up a special economic zone seems to be an answer to all regions' problems of economic backwardness. As long as most of the current SEZ are not even operating yet and far away from making the host region's economy flourish, it sounds naive to plan on building new ones to more and more remote places and actually believe that investors would follow. As setting up a special economic zone is an alternative often mentioned when considering what to do with economically backward regions, one gets the feeling that a SEZ is used as a mean to only cover, not to solve, deep economic difficulties and imbalances, and to keep those people satisfied who demand more economic equality between the two business centres and the rest of the country.

After all it has to be remembered that even though regional development and structural transformation of the Russian economy has been rather often discussed publicly, only rarely have even the names of the six new SEZs been mentioned when discussing these issues. The silence around the topic can also be a sign of something lying under the surface. This something could well be the unwillingness to truly develop the regions, as discussed above.

It should not be forgotten that during the research period the financial crisis of 2008 broke out, having a serious effect on the Russian economy. This has without question been the number one topic in the media, leaving not much room, or even interest, for the special economic zones. Given that the research would have been carried out earlier, or had the crisis not broken out, the results would possibly have been different. However, also the question of the impact of the financial crisis on the special economic zones is also an interesting one but unfortunately is not in the scope of this study, but could well be a topic for the next one.

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