

Report from Germany by Rainer Apel

Euro-Russian Deals Skyrocketing

There is a general increase in joint projects, with front-line aerospace ventures ranking prominently in recent agreements and talks.

The increasing number of economic agreements between Russia, and France, Germany, and Italy, comes as no surprise, because continental cooperative deals are playing a crucial role in Europe's new policy of self-assertion against the imperial drive of Washington war-hawks around Vice President Dick Cheney. More than the Franco-German-Russian opposition to the Iraq War, these deals—many of them pioneering in high technology—demonstrate that the leading economies of the Eurasian land-mass are looking after their own genuine interests.

Some of the designs for intensified Euro-Russian cooperation that are being publicized only now, were actually formulated three years ago; but recently, both sides have shown a commitment to turn them into reality. Europe may soon sign long-term cooperation and investment agreements with Russia, centering on securing the supply of crude oil and natural gas for Western Europe; several agreements have been signed for joint manufacturing of components of new generations of aircraft; and there are several new initiatives for cooperation in space technology, as well.

The original Russian proposal in the Spring of 2000, to turn debt into substantial industrial and infrastructural investment projects, unfortunately, was not realized, especially for Germany, which balked under the influence of short-sighted monetarist interests in grabbing Russian debt payments.

A new Russian proposal to Volkswagen, to build up an auto engine production site in Russia, with

several billion euros of investments, has a good chance of coming to pass. But German efforts to have the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad be an entryway for increased Euro-Russian trade, has hit opposition in Moscow and in other European capitals. Still, Russia has just announced that direct train connections between Moscow to Berlin will run daily, and that a connection from St. Petersburg to Berlin via Kaliningrad will be open soon.

Moreover, an Aug. 20-21 Warsaw meeting of the intergovernmental railway commission of Russia, Belarus, Poland, and Germany agreed to accelerate the completion of a direct freight corridor from Moscow to Berlin and on to Brussels, via Minsk and Warsaw. With the improvements in customs procedures at the respective borders, announced by Russian Railway Minister Gennady Fadeyev at the Warsaw meeting, rail freight which now takes three weeks to reach Berlin from Moscow, will arrive in four days. Rail freight traffic between Europe and Asia, via the Trans-Siberian Railroad, has increased just this year, by 70%, the Warsaw group announced.

The most spectacular progress, however, is being made in aerospace. At the just-concluded Moscow air exhibit MAKS 2003, the Franco-German-dominated European Aerospace and Defense Agency (EADS) made public some 20 cooperation agreements with Russian manufacturers. This includes manufacturing essential components for civilian European passenger jets like the Airbus, and also, as emphasized in Moscow, for the A400-M military air transport, which several EU armed forces will use, beginning

in 2007. And, in 2005, a European-Russian cooperation project will complete the new launch site for Russian launch vehicles in French Guiana, not far from where the European Space Agency launches its Ariane launch vehicle.

What was unprecedented, was the inking of Russo-German agreements, on the sidelines of MAKS 2003: This involves launching, over the years 2005-07, five German military spy satellites from the northern Russian site at Plesetsk, which is operated by the Russian Space Forces. The Germans will use these satellites to operate their SAR-Lupe camera, a new kind of synthetic aperture radar surveillance system, which is said to have even greater precision than the U.S. devices in use, at present. With the five satellites and a ground station system in place, global surveillance can take place independently of the U.S. systems, making available genuine, unfiltered intelligence for the Germans and the French, who are also part of the agreement.

Once completed in 2007, the system, which will orbit at 500 kilometers, and operate night and day with no interference from weather conditions, will provide high-quality radar images for at least ten years. The launches from Plesetsk include use of the Rokot launch vehicle, a joint project of EADS and Russia's leading rocket-developing agency Khrunichev.

This cooperation agreement apparently is only the kick-off for a far more extensive cooperation in space technology, as indicated by an Aug. 21 statement by the Russian agency Rosoboroneksport, which announced that this German-Russian deal "testifies to the further expansion of cooperation between Russian aircraft-making enterprises and their Western colleagues, and proves the existence of a great potential in Russian-German cooperation."