From Scotland to Russia

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Once the G7’s ‘awkward guest’, Russia is already preparing for the 2006 Summit – this time as host of the G8

For now – rightly – all eyes are fixed on Gleneagles. It is a tribute to the British Presidency of the G8, and to the increasing rigour and efficiency of the G8 process, that the preparatory work on the Gleneagles agenda – with climate change, Africa and development more generally at its core – should have been undertaken in such a thorough and outward-looking way.

But Gleneagles – crucial gathering as it is – will represent only one staging post in a continuum of intense international activity which needs to translate into concerted international action, through the UN Millennium + 5 Summit in New York in September; special summits of the EU with its key international partners, including Russia, in the autumn; the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong in December; and other international gatherings right up to, and beyond, the G8 Summit which the Russian Federation will host as Presidency of the G8, in summer 2006 – the first time Russia will have assumed this very special mantle.

Engagement and partnership
The decision at the Kananaskis Summit in 2002 that Russia should assume the 2006 G8 Presidency and host the annual summit was, as the G8 leaders said in their statement, a consequence of its “remarkable economic and democratic transformation” in recent years. No longer was Russia to be seen – as it was in the immediate post-Soviet era – as just a large regional state with nuclear weapons, but as a key partner whose most vital strategic interests complement those of the international community as a whole.

The decision was also a recognition of Russia’s role as an essential partner in the war against international terrorism and organised crime – a partnership made all the more vital by the horrific outrages of 9/11, and later in Indonesia, Kenya and Spain. It has become a
commonplace to observe that we live in an increasingly interdependent world – but the observation is no less true for being so frequently heard. Indeed, it constitutes the rationale for the entire G8 process. It is entirely logical and desirable that Russia should have taken its place in that unique forum for agreeing collective responses to collective challenges.

This status is not just a reflection of Russia’s strong economic performance (which saw growth reach 30 per cent in the first four years of President Putin’s presidency, and an increase in GDP of 7.1 per cent in 2004), but of its ability and willingness fully to shoulder its share of international responsibilities, and to define its national interests accordingly. Russia now plays a full and committed part in the great majority of the world’s counsels, not only in the G8, the UN and its various agencies, but in the Quartet which brings it together with the US, EU and UN; and closer to home, in the partnership which it has forged with the EU, which in Moscow in May of this year saw the approval of ‘road maps’ for four common spaces of co-operation in economics; freedom, security and justice; external security; and science, education and culture.

At the same time, Russia is entering the final stages of its negotiations for membership of the WTO – hopefully in time for the Hong Kong meeting. This level of engagement and partnership with the world’s other main actors is seen not only at the level of institutions and processes, but of full engagement in the formulation of policy, its explanation and its implementation. In the G8 this has meant Russia contributing in a significant way to work in progress on a number of key areas in addition to the war on terrorism – including non-proliferation, energy security, and, crucially for the stability and security of the whole world, the Broader Middle East Initiative.

Meanwhile, Russia, following its ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in October 2004, stands ready to play its full part in meeting the critical issue of climate change, which, with the challenges of development in general and Africa in particular, find themselves right at the top of the list of priorities for Gleneagles.

**Taking up the baton**

Russia looks forward to chairing preparations for all these tasks at the summit it will host in summer 2006: reviewing progress on the ‘inherited agenda’ of G8 initiatives; ensuring adequate measurement and energetic follow-through; and identifying new priorities for action in light of fast-moving international developments. At his meeting with Tony Blair in Moscow in June, President Putin signalled his wish to add help for the republics of the CIS to next year’s agenda – a significant priority for him, given the importance which he attaches to the sustainable development of these countries, and to their relations both with Russia and with the rest of the international community.

Russia will oversee preparations for the next G8 summit in the same workmanlike way which has characterised the current UK Presidency of the G8, and consulting as widely as possible with the many G8 stakeholders – in business, academia, the trade unions and NGOs.

At the same time, the Russian Presidency of the G8 will aim to preserve the uniquely personal quality of a gathering which gives discipline and direction to our efforts to shape a better world.