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The impasse in the Russian-EU relationship continues

Another Russia-EU summit was held in Nizhny Novgorod on June 9-10. It brought no settlement in any of the major issues for both partners (WTO membership, visa regime), thus displaying the sustained, serious divergence of interests between Russia and the EU, and the limited hopes for overcoming them.

At a meeting with the Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, the EU was represented by Herman Van Rompuy (President of the European Council) and Jose Manuel Barroso (President of the European Commission). The partners failed to reach concrete agreements in any of major areas of cooperation. The issue of introducing a visa-free regime between Russia and the EU only received yet another deadline (the end of July) for establishing a timetable for action. Nor did Russia's membership of the World Trade Organisation come any closer (this is a condition for negotiating a new Russia-EU basic agreement), and the prospect of Russia's accession before the end of this year seems ever less likely. Moscow did declare its readiness to lift its ban on imports of fresh fruits and vegetables from the EU, subject to special EU security guarantees (although it is unclear what these guarantees would be based on). Nor was much progress made in the Partnership for Modernisation; the European Investment Bank and Vneshekonombank (which is owned by the Russian state) only signed a memorandum of understanding to mutually consider funding projects which are part of this program (with up to €500 million coming from each side). <iwo>