

# Detachment Instead of Confrontation: Post-European Russia in Search of Self-Sufficiency

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Along with all the complexes of a superior nation,  
Russia has the great inferiority complex of a small country.

Joseph Brodsky  
*Less Than One*, 1976

“Our eagle, the heritage of Byzantium, is a two-headed one.  
Of course, eagles with one head are strong and powerful as well,  
but if you cut off the head of our eagle which is turned to the East,  
you will not turn him into a one-headed eagle, you will only make him bleed.”

Russian Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, from the speech in the State Duma  
in support of the construction of the Amur Railway, 1908

This project originated in 2015 when intellectual interaction between Russia and the West was rapidly degrading to mutual accusations and verbal fights over “who is to blame” and “how much more Russia should suffer before it is ready to repent.” We sought to provide a forum for analysts and political practitioners from Russia, Europe, the United States, and China to conduct a constructive dialogue and ultimately move from producing endless recriminations and claims to discussing the future of Russia’s role in international affairs. Naturally, this also meant discussing the future of the world as a whole.

At initial stages, we made a point of limiting our debates to a five-year period. This is the usual timeframe for national budget accounting. In other words, it is short enough to keep the thought from wandering astray. But it became clear quite soon that even such a limited timeframe was not very helpful for visualizing the future world order. The 20th century approaches, losing ground but remaining in force until the 2010s, albeit largely by inertia, have outlived themselves, and global politics is entering a new barely predictable era.

The global shift that began in the 1980s-1990s brought great expectations and hopes for building a “brave new world.” Russia emerged out of the rubble left by the Soviet Union’s collapse that became a truly pivotal point and was an important part of the “dreaming space.” A quarter of a century on, it is clear that most of the dreams never came true. The world failed to assume a state of balance that would replace the state of confrontation it was in throughout the second half of the 20th century. Russia made an attempt to become a “normal country” and integrate itself into Greater Europe but failed. It, for one, simply could not fit itself into the proposed format even though it earnestly tried to do so at first. And then, the Western-centric model visualized in the early 1990s never materialized in full.

There is a great temptation today to revert to old interpretations or ideological tricks. The Cold War spirit and rhetoric are back again, which does not encourage productive discussions

either between Russia and the West or inside Russia itself. Westernizers and *pochvenniks*, Atlanticists and Eurasianists, liberals and dirigistes are resuming their never-ending but quite predictable disputes.

The authors of this paper think that these disputes are worthy of attention as they can provide an insight into the new meaning and new qualities of Russia's positioning in world affairs. Also, they may help us understand whether we can grasp this new meaning and go beyond the habitual ideological battles that have been recurring since the 19th century.

*Perestroika* launched the process of the country's attempts to assess its prospects in the new world, releasing intellectual energy that had been suppressed for decades by the Soviet system. But the discourse was interrupted for about twenty years by the collapse of the Soviet Union. At first, the state and citizens were merely struggling to survive and then enjoyed the benefits of hydrocarbon wealth and the consumption boom it generated. Attempts to resume the discussion of ideas and values in 2012-2013 were torpedoed by the crisis in Ukraine: the authorities and society went into mobilization mode, and any thought was checked by propaganda and denunciation of "the fifth column" of the one side and "the henchmen of the regime" of the other.

Yet this discussion will have to be resumed one day since it has long been clear that the international environment is changing dramatically and the recipes of the past—liberal or conservative, progressionist or reactionary, leftist or rightist—no longer work. There is global demand for new ideas and a conceptual framework for development, but none are available so far. There is nowhere for Russia to borrow ready answers and it will have to find them on its own.

We have focused our attention on an issue that was probably most popular in terms of Russia's positioning over the past three decades and the preceding two centuries, that is, relations with Europe. In making our choice we were guided not by the stereotype but by the understanding that this is exactly where crucial changes had occurred and continue to occur.

We don't claim to know all the answers. We simply want to describe the situation and outline the contours of future discourse. The project will continue next year to pay more attention to non-European dimensions of the topic and take a critical look at the main points of this paper.

We thank Central European University in Budapest for organizing an international workshop in February 2016, which made an immeasurable contribution to this paper (the list of participants is attached). Naturally, this report does not reflect a common opinion shared by all the participants, and full responsibility rests entirely with the authors who took the liberty of using their ideas freely. We would like to express our special thanks to the MacArthur Foundation for financial support.

## "A New World Order" That Never Came

The year 2016 marked the end of a 70-year period in international relations that consisted of two phases: the Cold War in the 1940s-1980s and the time of transition after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Today the world is on its way into a new paradigm. It was announced at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s but never became a reality. The past quarter of a century was not a time of building a new world order but an attempt to adapt existing insti-

tutions that had survived ideological confrontation (mainly those that catered to the needs of the Western world) to a completely different international context. These attempts predictably failed. The deficiency of such an approach may not have been admitted de jure but has been realized de facto by an increasingly growing number of politicians and, most importantly, by the societies of the leading countries which do not support their own elites who pursued such policies for years on end.

There were two phases in the outgoing period, and each of these phases has some unique characteristics that make them exceptional in the history of international relations. During the Cold War, there was unprecedentedly strong strategic stability based on the military-political balance between the superpowers. The end of confrontation was accompanied by an unusual urge to spread the ideas and values of one group of countries to the whole world as universal. Whatever period is coming, it is more likely to reproduce the more classical patterns of international relations.

For all its risks and costs caused by the confrontation between the two systems and reliance on nuclear deterrence, the Cold War kept the world in measurably perfect order. The superpowers were constantly competing with each other in all spheres but were well aware (especially after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962) of the “red line” that could not be overstepped. A dramatic change in rhetoric after the end of the Cold War was essentially followed by an attempt to preserve the existing model of global control. However, it was no longer based on two counterbalancing superpowers but on one “hyperpower”<sup>1</sup> aspiring to act as a global regulator due to its enormous superiority in all components of power. In other words, **the Cold War and the policies that followed shared the intrinsic conviction that global processes could be controlled.**

Another common feature is the **ideologization of politics.** The struggle between two ideologies gave way to attempts to assert one “correct” ideological model. In both cases ideological patterns left a deep mark on geopolitical rivalry. After the Cold War the situation was further complicated by the fact that the neoliberal approach encouraged the reduction of the state’s role in all aspects of life. The state was losing capability as the main building block of international relations, thus making global processes far less controllable.

Finally, the third common feature, which is truly crucial for Russia, is the **existence of the West as a single political conception, essentially an institution.** The West as an idea appeared much earlier, of course, but until the middle of the 20th century it was a space where great powers were locked in a fierce rivalry with each other. The results of the World War II, primarily the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower, for the first time consolidated the West as an ideological, political, military, and economic community. Not only did this community remain after the end of the Cold War, but it became the institutional core of the world system. While the Soviet Union had clearly positioned itself as a system-wide opponent of the West, Russia faced a double dilemma. One dilemma was between accepting and rejecting the Western ideology and values (this issue had been present in Russian discourse for at least 200 years); the other one was between **agreeing and disagreeing to participate in the West-controlled political institu-**

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1 The term proposed for the United States in the late 1990s by then French Minister of Foreign Affairs Hubert Védrine. [http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/05/news/05iht-france.t\\_0.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/05/news/05iht-france.t_0.html)

**tions, an option never considered before.** In other words, Russia had no choice but determine its position with regard to the West for both purely internal reasons (discussed in detail below) and structural ones. The mixing of these two dimensions, hitherto separate, further aggravated painful relations in the 1990s and beyond.

The model of a monocentric world (structured around the United States and its allies), which seemed natural and inevitable a quarter of a century earlier, began to crack in the first several years of the new 21st century. It was seriously shaken by the 2008-2009 global financial crisis which started not in peripheral states (as was the case during the “Asian” wave in the late 1990s) but in the core — the United States and then the European Union. The mechanism of recovery through “nationalization of losses,” that is, through rescuing private banks at taxpayers’ expense, adopted at the end of the 2000s, challenged the moral validity of the entire economic model and incited protest against financial and economic globalization.

The world order born out of ideological confrontation in the second half of the 20th century entered the final stage of its crisis in 2014. The European Union and NATO moved to bring Ukraine into their institutional framework and refused to discuss their intentions with Russia. The latter responded very strongly and became firmly convinced that the West’s “geopolitical greed” could only be curbed with “an iron fist,” as Sergei Karaganov put it.<sup>2</sup>

By reincorporating Crimea and supporting anti-Kiev forces in Donbas, Moscow not just drew a “red line,” which it is prepared to defend with all available means, including military ones, but it also stated its refusal to obey the rules created when it was weak and could not fight for acceptable bargains. From Moscow’s point of view, the order established after 1991 was not a natural continuation of the agreements that secured peace and stability in Europe during the last years of the Cold War. So Russia did not view the realities that emerged after the breakup of the Soviet Union as immutable, nor did it consider its actions with regard to the neighboring countries (created after the concerted decisions of the 1970s-1980s) a violation of the earlier accords. In other words, **Russia never fully agreed with the “new world order,” which the West took for granted**, even though it put up with it as a given until the middle of the 2000. As Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard rightfully observed, “Europeans had mistaken Russia’s failure to block the creation of the post-Cold War order as assent. They mistook weakness for conversion.”<sup>3</sup>

Russia’s military intervention in Syria in the fall of 2015 reaffirmed its refusal to accept unwritten rules—Moscow started a military operation beyond the sphere of its immediate interests, which until then had been the exclusive prerogative of the United States.

Russia’s strong resistance to further expansion of the EU/NATO-centric project into the territory of the former Soviet Union became a catalyst and largely a symbol for crucial changes

2 Sergei Karaganov wrote in December 2008 in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*: “After Tbilisi’s provocation [five-day Russian-Georgian war – Ed.] there prevailed a view, dangerous in politics, that the only argument the West could understand was ‘an iron fist.’ Almost unanimous, and obviously unfair, accusations of aggression in the first several days of the conflict seriously undermined the habitually strong attractiveness of Europe among Russian people.”

3 Ivan Krastev & Mark Leonard. *The New European Disorder*. European Council on Foreign Relations, November, 2014 [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the\\_new\\_european\\_disorder322](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_new_european_disorder322)

in global affairs. It really did, because the West continued to believe that the expansion of its model and institutions was historically irreversible and hence undisputable. But **the decay of the world system** was not caused only by the position of Russia, which failed to fit itself into the proposed framework, but also by **profound problems lying in the very core of the world order after the Cold War, that is, European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.**

## Erosion of Institutions and the “Globalization Paradox”

The “end of history” ideology that prevailed in the 1980s-1990s stumbled upon the world’s heterogeneity. A substantial number of countries did not want to, or worse still, proved unable to accept the scheme proposed by the West. But the main reason for the crisis was the fact that liberal globalization met with growing resistance within its originating communities.

The “globalization paradox” described by Dani Rodrik (impossibility to combine all three components at the same time—deep economic integration, sovereignty, and democracy) shook socio-political foundations in the leading countries themselves. Referendums in the EU, the rapid rise of Donald Trump, and the popularity of Bernie Sanders in the United States show that direct democratic expression of the will plays into the hands of groups that openly oppose the Establishment. Accusations of irresponsibility, incompetence and xenophobia thrown at nascent political forces often just strengthen their protest appeal.

Political elites had to become cosmopolitan in the hope it will help them retain control over the processes taking place in their own countries through participation in the emerging supranational governance mechanisms. However, they continued to draw their legitimacy from the national vote in their respective countries while the voters began to feel growing socioeconomic discomfort, which they linked with global processes and the drift of the ruling elites away from their “roots.”

The impoverishment and segmentation of the middle class, which had been the basis of the entire post-war political system in the West, led to the decline of party systems. Mainstream parties had simply lost the knack of working with the discontented and shifted this burden to “populists” and new political forces appealing to the feeling of insecurity and confusion among social groups that had realized that the quality of their life would keep declining. Francis Fukuyama writes, though, that “‘populism’ is the label that political elites attach to policies supported by ordinary citizens that they don’t like. There is of course no reason why democratic voters should always choose wisely, particularly in an age when globalization makes policy choices so complex. But elites don’t always choose correctly either, and their dismissal of the popular choice often masks the nakedness of their own positions.”<sup>4</sup>

This fuels protectionist sentiment (not only economically but much broader) and whips up demand for “control” (the main slogan of Brexit campaign was to “regain control” of one’s own life expropriated by the “illegitimate supranational bureaucracy”) and “security” (a particularly

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4 Francis Fukuyama. American Political Decay or Renewal? The Meaning of the 2016 Election. *Foreign Affairs*, July – August 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/american-political-decay-or-renewal>

sensitive issue amid rising violence under the banner of Islamic radicalism). This contradicts the ideology of an open world without borders that triumphed in the 1980s-1990s. People's concerns affect not only the world as a whole, but also individual countries, especially federative ones with a complex composition. A new wave of sovereignization that started with the redrawing of borders after the Cold War at the end of last century has now reached the system's core.

Governments are looking for (as a rule without much success) ways to adapt to "global winds." And while previously the general view was that large communities are "too big to fail" in the global world, the 21st century has brought a different experience. Greece is a good example. It would have resolved its crisis much easier and faster outside of the Eurozone than within it. Catalonia, Flanders and Scotland graphically illustrate hopes (grounded or not) that a compact region can better cope with the challenges of globalization than a nation-state which people do not regard as something that is truly theirs. Northern Italy and other regions may join them in the near future.

UK's stunning decision to leave the European Union for the first time creates a situation where the EU is shrinking rather than enlarging. Add official withdrawal of admission applications filed some time ago by Switzerland and Iceland. European political elites are giving up the policy of expansion to focus almost entirely on internal problems.

The United States is in transition from "a unipolar moment" proclaimed by Charles Krauthammer in 1990 (America's ability to achieve whatever it thinks necessary) to a new role of the world's most powerful country which is not an unquestionable hegemon and, most importantly, which does not aspire "to be everywhere." This transition is accompanied by dissonance between the ruling class and the majority of people as borne out by the surreal U.S. election campaign in 2016. The Establishment has to revise priorities to make up for American society's fatigue from the foreign-policy thrust in the past twenty years.

A predilection for isolationism has always been an important part of American political culture. However, after World War II and especially the Cold War there prevailed the concept of America's inevitable political leadership in the West and eventually in the whole world (self-perception of America as "the indispensable nation," as Madeleine Albright put it). Now that this period is drawing to an end, there emerge much more isolationist views sustained by the rise of non-Western centers of economic influence, primarily China. The latter skillfully used the advantages of global liberalization and at some point began to outplay its initiators, which prompts Western countries to correct global rules in their own favor. In fact, China is the first country that is deeply integrated in the Western economic system but does not reproduce the liberal political model, refuses to follow in the U.S.'s steps, and potentially can even challenge it.

NATO has officially regained unity and revived its Cold War goal of containing Moscow. But the alliance has no answers to the most acute security challenges such as the spread of conflicts in key regions of the world (Middle East, East and Southeast Asia) and the worldwide rise of Islamic terrorism. The latter is not an external but an internal threat for the majority of Western countries. In addition, Turkey, a key member of NATO with its second largest army, pursues a policy that is frequently out of sync with that of its allies in Europe and America.

The proposed recipes for containing Moscow make the remilitarization of politics and even conflict in Europe much more probable, but the Cold War mechanisms to manage confron-



tation and minimize risks are gone. Efforts to recreate them have been slow so far. The West believes that a new dialogue on “confidence-building measures” would legitimize Russia as an equal military-political partner, which is completely at odds with its philosophy of the 1990s and 2000s.

Global politics in general becomes less and less orderly. After the Cold War the West made an attempt to westernize global governance and expand the competence of organizations that had previously covered only Western countries (WTO, Bretton-Wood structures, and at some point NATO) to the rest of the world. But the task appeared to be too multifaceted to solve. Now we can see the emergence of other institutions, more formal or less formal, representing the non-Western part of the world: BRICS, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (initiated by China), Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and others. They all have yet to prove their worth as not all of them have so far tapped their full potential. But their appearance mirrors the general trend: the global economic space is falling apart into segments and the idea of universalism (based on Western principles), which prevailed after the West’s victory in the confrontation with the Soviet Union, is losing relevance.

It is the West that now wants to wind down its all-encompassing policy and “fence off” its own area of influence and responsibility, sort of “lock in profits” after the rapid rise and expansion. The idea of trade and economic mega blocs (Trans-Pacific Partnership and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) put forth during Barack Obama’s presidency is not formally at variance with the WTO principles. But in reality the new structures will aim to create a hard and very “deep” (permeating all levels) regulatory framework for member states and glue them together through transnational corporations which will get much broader rights. New candidates wishing to join them will have virtually no possibility to negotiate the terms of their admission.

This is not a new practice. The enlargement of the EU and NATO in the 1990s-2000s also required unconditional agreement of candidate countries with the standards established without them. It was an instrument of expansion allowing Euro-Atlantic structures to transform countries within their sphere of interests, especially since these countries were eager to join the “club” and assert themselves as part of the Western world, even though in a minor and subordinate role. The expansion of Western structures went smoothly and met no resistance until the second half of the 2000s as the countries that could potentially have objected were weak (Russia) or thought it was premature to show their own ambitions and tried to take maximum advantage from participation in the global system (China). (A more flexible approach was applied on the global level and those wishing to join had some room for bargaining. The WTO is a vivid example. Canny and persistent countries, such as China, and to a certain extent Russia managed to get some important concessions.)

In the new structures (TPP and TTIP), the “bundle acceptance” of norms performs the opposite function by cutting off those who should not be there. In fact, when speaking about the importance of making and ratifying the TPP agreement, the U.S. president repeatedly stressed that its chief goal was to allow member countries to set the rules of trade in the Asia Pacific region and not to let China dictate its will. For more than two decades, trade and economic agreements were always justified using the “zero-sum game” argument that promised benefits for everyone. Now the tone has changed.

Naturally, political changes are caused by major economic and technological transformations. In the past several decades, the world economy relied entirely on global value chains through distributed production with parts of manufacturing facilities located in developing countries, thus paving the way for economic globalization. As technologies change, demand for global outreach and use of resource-supplying partners (including cheap labor) is decreasing. Production facilities are concentrated mainly in countries and regions that have highly skilled personnel and strong scientific and technological schools. As a result, industrial capacities earlier relocated to other countries are moving back to the West but on a new technological basis. At this point, production in developed countries is mostly technology-intensive and expensive, but experts say that as technologies become more affordable, these countries will employ robotic solutions to make cheap consumer goods as well. As Boston Consulting Group has implied, “Because relatively low-cost manufacturing centers exist in all regions of the world, more goods consumed in Asia, Europe, and the Americas will be made closer to home.”<sup>5</sup> This raises questions about the relevancy of renewed discussions in Russia about the need for its “integration into global manufacturing chains.”<sup>6</sup>

## Playing the “Great Game” in a New Way

It is generally believed that the coming era will bring the world system back to more traditional models. Signs of policies dating back to different periods in the past can already be seen today.

**Nineteenth century-styled rivalry between great powers** is back on track. Lord Palmerston famous phrase described it as follows: “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual.” At first glance, the existence of the North Atlantic Alliance proves this approach wrong. But NATO is the legacy of the past, it remains the only and unique bloc which is based on rigid commitments and shared ideology. New blocs of the kind are nowhere to be seen and are hardly possible. But even within NATO itself differences in opinions, assessments and priorities are already much more noticeable than ever before. They can be seen among European allies but especially between Europe and Turkey.

Other strategically significant relations, including those involving the United States, tend to be more flexible, and this is quite obvious in Asia. Although many of the APR countries are concerned about China’s rise and would like to get more security guarantees from the U.S., they are not so eager to get fully engaged in the new system Washington is creating to contain Beijing.

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5 Harold L. Sirkin, Michael Zinser, and Justin Rose. *The Shifting Economics of Global Manufacturing. How Cost Competitiveness Is Changing Worldwide*. August 19, 2014. [https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/lean\\_manufacturing\\_globalization\\_shifting\\_economics\\_global\\_manufacturing/](https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/lean_manufacturing_globalization_shifting_economics_global_manufacturing/)

6 The Russian discourse on the country’s place in the world is often characterized by polemics that reportedly sparked at a meeting of the presidential Economic Council in May 2016. According to Vedomosti, former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said that Russia was lagging behind technologically and therefore should integrate, albeit in a supporting role, into international technological chains. In order to do that it would have to ease geopolitical tensions. President Vladimir Putin responded by saying that Russia might be lagging in some respects, but it had a thousand-year-old history and would not sell its sovereignty. Given the shifts in international economic relations, both positions seem to belong in the past.

Another graphic example is Japan and South Korea which have close military-political ties with the United States but still look for every opportunity to stay away from its anti-Russian policy and actually strengthen relations with Russia. Despite Washington's pressure, Seoul did not impose sanctions against Russia after it had reincorporated Crimea, and Tokyo de facto withdrew from the sanctions after a meeting between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Vladimir Putin in the spring of 2016.

The extremely unpredictable and chaotically changing environment forces the states to use different methods to protect their interests, while at the same time avoiding long-term alliances which limit their freedom of maneuver. For example, China strongly rejects Western models of rigid alliances with formal commitments, because failure to fulfill them leads to moral demise and "loss of face," which devalues the status of the leader in the East even more than in the West. Just look at how NATO has been fussing over the collective defense of the Baltic States or Poland from the impending "Russian aggression."

New strategic relations, such as those Russia and China are trying to build, do not presuppose strict hierarchy or full political and security coordination. They are based on mutual complementarity, non-participation in third-party coalitions against partners, and mutual political and economic support if one of the partners comes under external pressure. And yet, it would be legitimate to assume that both Moscow and Beijing consider such support obligatory as they understand that by allowing a partner to be attacked, they themselves can become an easy target. The two countries are apparently building unwritten but vital mutual guarantees that may be called strategic as they concern their long-term positioning vis-à-vis each other. Neither Russia nor China wants to forge a binding alliance that would require them to show full solidarity on all issues or accept any risks one of them may create. In other words, Beijing will not back Moscow over Crimea and will keep neutrality, and Russia will not endorse Beijing's claims in the South China Sea, but nor will it offer support to its opponents<sup>7</sup>. However, it becomes increasingly clear that China will lend its shoulder if the sanctions put Russia on the verge of collapse, and Russia will not allow direct military blackmail against China if relations in the Pacific sharply deteriorate for some reason.

But no one should have any illusions. While preserving strategic loyalty to Moscow, Beijing remains a very unyielding partner when it comes to its practical interests. It defends them vigorously, making no allowances for its counterpart's weaknesses. Russia will have to constantly prove its socioeconomic capability to China which tends to doubt it. This brings to the fore the need for the accelerated development of Russian territories beyond the Urals, which Asia largely views as a yardstick for assessing Russia's prospects.

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7 Speaking at MGIMO University on March 23, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping for the first time called for building «a new type of international relations with win-win cooperation at its core.» Chinese political commentators stress that this idea was the starting point for Xi's foreign-policy strategy. It gave rise to a concept proposing "a new type of great power relations," which China wants to use as the basis for its relationship with the United States. Chinese publications say that Xi's strategy of "a new type of international relations" has been used in the past three years for furthering cooperation with Russia, the U.S., and Europe. For the time being, however, the contours of such relationship can only be seen between Russia and China.

## An Echo of the Thirty Years' War

As borders become increasingly eroded and states lose their grip on internal processes, various non-state actors come into play, including religious extremist groups which reject existing forms of statehood. This takes us back to the **period before nation-building started in Europe**. States are facing a very complex challenge: How to regain the ability to govern and survive? They have to do this in a situation where the previous principles of nation-states, which did not always succeed in solving their development tasks in the past, no longer work, because society becomes increasingly heterogeneous and the state is less and less able to provide social guarantees that served as a major safeguard against upheavals in the 20th century.

The outgoing world order was a result of World War II and reflected the balance of power established after it. The Cold War did not develop into a hot one mainly due to nuclear deterrence. But this is precisely the reason why it ended without establishing a new hierarchy officially even though it seems to have been created unofficially. All the subsequent events were caused by a fundamental disagreement between the de facto obvious outcome of the confrontation of the 1940s-1980s (the West's victory over the Soviet Union) and the absence of its de jure formalization recognized by all. No stable world order could emerge on such shaky ground and it never did. It can only emerge after the next round of confrontation that would establish a new balance of power and interests.

The factor of nuclear weapons remains in force and helps prevent a new world war. But there can be **a series of long medium- or high-intensity local conflicts as a means of building a new hierarchy**. A historical analogy is **the 17th century Thirty Years' War in Europe** which led to the birth of the first "world order" (Europe controlled world politics back then) known as the Westphalian system.

## Vienna Logic and Potsdam Logic

The year 2016 filled with stormy events in the Middle East, Europe, America, and East and Southeast Asia shows that new tendencies become increasingly pronounced and previous solutions (used during the Cold War and after it) no longer work. But the NATO summit in Warsaw in July essentially approved a return to the Cold War paradigm and defined Russia as the main challenge that has to be contained. Even if one assumes that disagreements between Russia and NATO are significant (although today's ideological conflict is of different nature and does not aim to make the opponent change its socio-political system), still they make up only a tiny part of the global agenda. The fundamental difference from the past Cold War is that the previous confrontation between Moscow and Washington was at the core of international relations, whereas now it is no more than one of their components, albeit an important one.

Having won the confrontation in the second half of the 20th century, after the Cold War the West could choose how to organize the world further. Could the leaders (primarily the U.S.) preemptively "share" their power? At the end of the 20th century, the West had an enormous advantage in all aspects of power and influence. It would have taken a lot of wisdom and prescience at the height of its power to share some of the prerogatives with less advantaged countries or even those which, like Russia, were struggling to survive and retain their significance.

The West had a choice in the 1990s. The first option would have been the **Congress of Vienna logic** which allowed defeated France to be included in the club of five great powers that subsequently formed the Concert of Europe. The second option would have been the **Potsdam logic** which prevented Germany from becoming a great power again in the 20th century<sup>8</sup> (the latter task was solved more than successfully and Germany is still frightened of this status).

But neither type of logic was fully translated into life. The West did not show interest in integrating Russia into its structures (institutionally, not verbally) and taking tangible steps to facilitate its inner transformation (it is hard to imagine though how much effort this would have required). On the other hand, it did not “finish off” Russia, obviously hoping, as Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested, that having lost Ukraine and other imperial peripheries, Russia would not have enough resources to regain the status of great power. In addition, Russia’s crisis of in the 1990s was so profound that few could expect its quick political and economic recovery to a more or less significant level.

As a result, Russia preserved great power mentality but it was combined with unclear resource constraints and amassed—imaginary and real—hurts, humiliations and claims over unfulfilled guarantees (such as endless disputes over promises that NATO would not expand eastward). The fact that at some point Russia truly believed in the possibility of building trustworthy relationships with the EU and the U.S. only exacerbated the current crisis of trust.

What makes the situation dangerous is that having regained geopolitical agility and tactical mastery, Russia feels insulted, estranged and unnerved and understands that if it backs down again, it will be “finished off.” Sadly enough, but hysterics in foreign policy and discourse on the world’s future (Artemy Magun has defined the contemporary atmosphere as the triumph of “*hysterical Machiavellianism*”) can be seen in other countries, as well. Deep uncertainty permeates European discussions on the future and American election debates centered on the existential threat motive. There is bitter irony in that the West publicly identifies Putin and Russia with insidious power (just look at the prominence, truly unprecedented since the end of the Cold War, that has been given to “the Russian issue” in the U.S. presidential campaign), while Russia itself suffers from the “besieged fortress” syndrome and is convinced of the omnipotent and omnipresent “hand of Washington.”

It is noteworthy that China sees the West’s political role in a similar way even though it developed much more successfully in recent years and followed a path that is completely different from Russia’s. However, the prevailing view of China in the West was that the development

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8 American diplomat Charles Freeman has a similar view. But it must be said that the exclusion of “post-Czarist Russia” from the councils of Europe was the Bolsheviks’ choice. “Wise American statecraft would welcome, not resist, Russian participation in the governance of affairs in both Europe and the Eurasian landmass as a whole. There are many existing institutional frameworks for this, including the OSCE, the NATO-Russia Council, the Council of Europe, the Shanghai Cooperation Council, and others. The reintegration of post-revolutionary France in the Concert of Europe after the Napoleonic wars showed how the inclusion of former adversaries in decision-making can promote long-term peace and stability in Europe. The exclusion of post-Wilhelmine Germany and post-Czarist Russia from the councils of Europe after World War I did not work out so well. That experience should drive home the peril of excluding great powers from an appropriate role in managing affairs in which they have a legitimate interest.”

of a market economy would inevitably lead the country to political liberalization and gradual integration into the Western community. But hopes, publicly aired in the United States and Europe, to see the sprouts of the “Western” order in China raised doubts among its leaders about the actual goals pursued by the West, especially since Washington was relentlessly pushing for democracy worldwide, including by way of forcible regime change.

## Transformation in the Wrong Direction

Expectations of transformation “in the right direction” did not come true either in Russia or China. But when this became obvious, the West was already losing full control over global processes, and many were beginning to have doubts whether the proposed direction was so “right” after all. Attempts to offer “bits” of power to “the Rest” (a popular American term reflecting the West’s unambiguous perception of itself as the center of the world) came too late. This became particularly clear in the late 2000s and early 2010s when the United States was actively discussing the idea of “Chimerica,” a term coined to describe the symbiotic relationship between China and America. Beijing saw it as Washington’s attempt to divide not global “assets” but “liabilities,” that is, responsibility for the deteriorating international situation, which China certainly did not want to do. And there was no trust needed for discussing such a “major deal.” Today the level of suspicion between all key players is so high that it would be unrealistic to expect any amicable consensus on global power-sharing.

The fact that not only individual states but many societies, advanced economies among them, are feeling “disadvantaged” is an essential factor shaping global trends. According to a survey conducted in the fall of 2014 by *Pew Research*, on the average 65 percent of people in richer nations thought children in their countries would be worse off financially than their parents, and only 28 percent had the opposite opinion. In emerging and developing nations 50 percent felt more optimistic that the next generation would have a higher standard of living, while 25 percent thought otherwise. As the middle class in America and Western Europe is getting poorer, it reacts to globalization by losing trust in traditional political parties (and views them as cosmopolites losing touch with their grassroots) and spewing out extravagant, and often irresponsible, forces which are barely controlled by the Establishment but get involved in domestic and international affairs, adding to general uncertainty.

This is a challenge faced not only by Western states but also, in a way, by the majority of developing countries which reaped the benefits of the global economy in the past years. The large-scale and uncompromising anti-corruption campaign in China, which has changed the overall political landscape in the country, is clearly designed to demonstrate that the Communist Party is able to cleanse itself of those who have “forgotten about the people” in their pursuit of wealth and alien way of life. But it also exposes uncertainty within the Chinese leadership.

The issue of “justice” gradually becomes prevalent around the world just as the slogan of “freedom” did some thirty years ago. The main question that usually arises at crucial moments is: Will the political systems be able to produce leaders who can satisfy these demands in an evolutionary and constructive manner? Or will radical and destructive forces take transformations under their control?

The upcoming period is likely to become a time when the world system created in the second half of the 20th century will be deconstructed after abortive attempts to adapt it to the new conditions. Methods and stereotypes firmly established in the previous seven decades will have to be scrapped in order to work out a new policy and rules of conduct for states. The main risk lies in the degree of willingness and readiness of the dominant power (the U.S.) to defend its central position acquired by the end of the 20th century. Washington will have to choose between a controlled transition from a unipolar system while retaining all the advantages but not hegemony, and increasingly rigorous counteraction, including the use of force, to growing challenges for its hegemony. Much will also depend on the “contenders” or, to be more precise, on those who oppose the “broader West” concept, primarily Russia and China. Their readiness to provoke “the boss” or give in to provocations can smooth over or, on the contrary, complicate the global transformation.

Many experts note that the international agenda in the 21st century is strikingly different from the 20th-century one. Coming to the fore are such acute challenges as climate change, new technologies and related ethical dilemmas, the changing role of cosmopolitan megalopolises, food security, the threat of pandemics, transnational migration, the distribution of human resources in general, and the like. Many conclude that Russia’s *Realpolitik*-based approach is obsolete and does not allow the country to take a worthy place in present-day global politics, which is generally more concerned with something else.

Apparently, Russia’s approach is one-sided. But this in no way indicates that the issues which worry “old-fashioned” Russia are unimportant. Moreover, international events vividly show that “classic” problems unresolved in the 20th century—power imbalances, lack of indisputable international hierarchy, erosion of generally accepted rules, failure to build a new world order—constantly resurface, preventing countries from pooling their efforts against new challenges. Unless they are resolved, key actors will keep going back to the same models of behavior.

## Russian Identity and the System of External Coordinates: Transformation

Changes in the global context are of fundamental importance to Russia—not only and not so much in terms of foreign policy understood in the narrow sense as in the context of forming a new identity that is directly linked with its positioning in the world. **The era that started in the mid-1940s and is now drawing to a close was possibly the historical culminating point of Russia’s direct involvement in European affairs.** Throughout the Cold War, part of Europe was controlled by Moscow. The Old World’s future largely depended on decisions made in the Kremlin. When that era was over, Russia made an attempt to become part of new Europe, to entirely identify itself as its integral element. How it all proceeded and why it failed will be discussed below. But now this possibility is no longer on the agenda.

The entire paradigm of the world system is changing and remains very unstable. Finding a niche in any of the existing projects is utterly complicated or altogether impossible. In other words, when the whole system is in motion, getting integrated into anything is a hopeless task.

In Russia, all these global trends overlap with longer processes of building national and collective identities and determining the country's place in the world. The growing global uncertainty brings to the forefront the task of achieving stable and independent self-identification that could be used as the basis for development.

The crisis in relations with the West, which went into high gear in 2013-2014, has brought about a new configuration of Russia's foreign policy ties. It has accelerated and made more transparent the important processes of reformatting the collective identity. It goes without saying that such changes are more significant than situational shifts in relations with this or that country. Such changes in the sphere of collective security have been ripening for quite a while and they will have far-reaching effects on all aspects of Russia's life, including on the way it positions itself in international affairs.

The central point of our analysis is that a considerable share of the elites and a majority of the population no longer associate Russia's future with a Western perspective. We are fully aware that there is no sociological proof for this postulate at the moment. One can easily brush it aside as an "impressionist," especially if one dislikes it from the very start. Yet the available sociological data by no means contradict our assumption.

The sharp growth (up to 75% of the polled) in the number of those who saw the West as Russia's foe in 2015 should, of course, be attributed to the effects of mass media. As soon as confrontational TV propaganda somewhat eased in 2016, the effect manifested itself before long—the share of those who regard the West as an enemy decreased to 60%-65%. Yet no increase has occurred in the number of people having a friendly attitude to the West. In other words, less hostility by no means breeds friends. Instead, a noticeable growth occurs in the number of indifferent people, and even those who are friendly towards the West remain rather detached.

**Russians' friendliness towards the West stemmed from the expectation it might be possible to implement some joint project for the future.** Faith in this possibility was shrinking steadily throughout the post-Soviet period. Today it remains an ideology shared by few small groups. Russians' expectations upped noticeably (by 11%) in 2016 on the feeling that the country had mastered the art of survival amid sanctions instead of collapsing in confrontation with the West.

The discourse analysis of modern polemics over Russia's future unequivocally indicates that the West in general and Europe in particular no longer take center stage in Russians' vision of the future. Sociological data in no way contradict that. Not that new ideas have taken the final shape. On the contrary, the related debates are just gaining momentum, but departure from Eurocentrism is an accomplished fact.

Understanding the nature and scale of these changes requires that we look at them through the prism of long historical processes.

## Russia and Europe in Each Other's Identification Discourses

For centuries Russia, alongside with the Ottoman Empire, played the role of a constitutive Other in the formation of European identity. This issue was analyzed in detail by Norwegian scholar



Iver Neumann in his book *Uses of the Other: The East in European Identity Formation*.<sup>9</sup> In brief, Neumann's ideas look as follows.

For more than three centuries Russia was represented in the European discourse in two ways. One—that of “**a barbarian at the gate**”—is more than clear and needs no explanation. These days we are witnessing its yet another edition. It should be noted, though, that some peripheral European groups would occasionally see the “barbarian” not only as a menace but also as a chance for Europe to rejuvenate itself. Russia takes note of that with interest but as a rule tends to exaggerate the importance of such utterances.

The other role attributed to Russia in the European identity discourses is that of “**an eternal apprentice**.” In medieval Europe, the apprentice was entirely dependent on the master craftsman, who was responsible for his instruction. Some were allowed to create and present their own masterpiece for the whole guild to judge its merits and to become a member of the guild in case of approval. In Russia's case the European discourse invariably insisted that “the apprentice is not good enough yet.” The role of an eternal apprentice was (and still is) a trap, where Europe invariably positions itself as an instructor and changes evaluation criteria again and again, thereby perpetuating Russia's role of a trainee.

When at the turn of the 18th century historian Nikolai Karamzin in his *Letters of a Russian Traveler* referred to Russia as Europe's apprentice, he did so with the certainty of a top-of-the-class student who easily masters the course of instruction and hopes the graduation ceremony is due before long. The role of an apprentice did not entail any emotional frustration and European achievements were adored and accepted with gratitude, but only as long as there remained the conviction that the period of apprenticeship was destined to draw to an early and successful end.

The French Revolution, with all its terror horrors and the ensuing Napoleonic invasion of Russia, which served as a fresh reminder “enlightened” Europe was also a source of lethal threat, shattered Karamzin's juvenile and self-confident Europeanism. Yet the Westernizers and Slavophiles spent the first half of the 19th century arguing which European values—liberal or conservative—were closer to Russia, whether the West was a source of “progress” or a “land of holy miracles” (as a prominent Slavophile Alexei Khomyakov put it). Whatever the case, the West always remained in the limelight of Russian discourses over the past and the future, in other words, over identity. Amid such debates Sergei Uvarov, Russian Minister of Education and the author of the well-known triad *Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality*, came up with an idea of Russia's emancipation in Europe. He postulated that Russia had matured to a point where it was free to choose its own way and judgment criteria. In other words, Uvarov tried to leave the European orientation intact but at the same time to shrug off the legacy of the master craftsman-apprentice relationship. Together with dissident philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev, Uvarov in those days admired Alexander Pushkin's poem *To the Slanderers of Russia* (one of the most passionate manifestation of Russian patriotism in 19th century literature).

In the 19th century, some skeptics developed a sober understanding of the European discourse over Russia, as well as Russians' inability to change it, as they had no say in shaping

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9 Iver B. Neumann. *Uses of the Other: “The East” in European Identity Formation*. UofMinnesota Press, 1999.

their agenda. Whatever the case, historian and philosopher Nikolai Danilevsky, who in 1869 for the first time postulated that “**Russia is not Europe**” and should not seek to get there, at first remained an exotic personality and a marginal one in many respects. Danilevsky saw Europe as a *hostile* civilization. The vision of the West as a source of threat to sovereignty was unmistakably present in Russia, and in that sense it looked very much like Japan of that time. However, in contrast to Japan, a majority of the Russian elites saw their task not in protecting sovereignty and identity from aggression by the West, but in Russia’s assertion as an integral and full-fledged member of the European concert of powers, European civilization, and the European civilizational mission.

In 1881 Fyodor Dostoyevsky described the European peg as a mental disorder: “This fear that Europe might regard us as Asians has been haunting us for almost two centuries. It has particularly increased during the present nineteenth century, reaching almost the point of panic... this erroneous fright of ours, this mistaken view of ourselves solely as Europeans, and not as Asians – which we have never ceased to be – this shame and this faulty opinion have cost us a good deal in the course of the last two centuries, and the price we have had to pay has consisted of the loss of our spiritual independence, of our unsuccessful policies in Europe, and finally of money – God only knows how much money – which we spent in order to prove to Europe that we were Europeans, and not Asians.” (Geok Tepe. *What does Asia Mean to Us?*)

At the beginning of the 20th century, a number of leading Russian politicians and statesman insisted that Russia’s future is in Asia. Among them were such figures as Sergei Witte, Pyotr Stolypin, Pyotr Durnovo and Roman Rosen. When he dreamed of twenty years of calm for Russia, Prime Minister Stolypin had in mind not only the risk of an internal revolution, but the need to keep away from the soaring threat of war in Europe. (Obviously, the two are most closely intertwined). Stolypin’s colossal resettlement program was geared to moving Russia’s center of gravity closer to the Pacific Region. All these people, often divided by political contradictions and personal ambitions, saw 20th century Russia as an empire of continental scale with a population of more than 400 million and the sole rival of the United States that possessed comparable resources.

After World War I, in which Russia fought for its role of a great European power, and the revolution that wiped out the Empire and the old society as such, Soviet Russia started looking at Europe as a scene for advancing the world revolution, and then, in the 1930s as a ripening threat. Europe stopped serving as an example to follow or as a source of inspiration. The United States emerged as the benchmark—as the main ally in World War II and then as the arch foe in the Cold War. The Soviet Union shared Europe with the United States and it already considered the continent as a site for two superpowers to compete.

## The “Common European Home” Project and What Came of It

Russian Europeanism experienced renaissance and climaxed at the end of the 20th century, when Mikhail Gorbachev and society whose support he enjoyed gave up the Cold War. The inspiring idea was not just getting closer to Europe but creating common structures capable of uniting the entire continent “from Lisbon to Vladivostok” in the common space of security and humanitarian and economic cooperation.

It is noteworthy that Gorbachev's idea of a "common European home," although the first and last president of the Soviet Union was strongly committed to the "common humanitarian values," by no means implied that the country might just get diluted in some Western community. Gorbachev and his associates maintained that a "common European home" and a "new world order" that would follow (it was Gorbachev who coined that term in 1986) should become a joint venture of ex-rivals. The Soviet Union and the West would pool efforts to build something together, in fact using for the blueprints the idea of convergence of socialism and capitalism that the most well-known Soviet dissident and Nobel laureate Andrei Sakharov had put forward a decade before (and still earlier that was done by Russian-American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin). In other words, the Soviet authorities of the *perestroika* era expected equitable participation in creating a new world, and not subordination to some "correct" system. The superpower's collapse buried that model.

Generally speaking, the liberal movement in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was keen to blend into the common anti-Soviet, anti-imperial and unequivocally pro-Western narrative, typical of the anti-Communist and nationalist movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union's constituent republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan). That such copying was artificial remained unnoticed amid the revolutionary zeal of reorganization, but it was quick to manifest itself immediately after the demise of the USSR.

After the Soviet Union's collapse the Yeltsin leadership still hoped for unification with the West. **In the early 1990s, Russia existed—for the first time in its history—in a situation of the Westernizers' complete ideological triumph and even political victory**, although the intellectual and moral features of that new edition of Westernism left much to be desired. A most deplorable feature of those years was neglect for the experience of Euroskepticism, that is, critical attitude towards Europe that Russian gradually developed from the end of the 19th century till the early 20th century.

As we all know today, the decision that Europe would not have any new structures but see the expansion of those that had existed during the Cold War and were unable to incorporate Russia (the EU and NATO) or implied Russia's unilateral adjustment to the Western templates (the Council of Europe) was made in Washington back in the early 1990s.<sup>10</sup> (It is quite remarkable that the sole structure that innately allowed for Russia's equitable participation—the CSCE/OSCE—underwent fast degradation after the Cold War to the role of an election watchdog in the post-Soviet space).

An explanation of the European position can be found in Ralf Dahrendorf's book *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (1990): "Europe is not a geographical or even cultural concept, but one of acute political significance. This arises at least in part from the fact that small and medium-sized countries try to determine their destiny together. A superpower has no place in their midst, even if it is not an economic and perhaps no longer a political giant. The capacity to kill the whole of mankind several times over puts the Soviet Union in a company different from Germany and Italy, Poland and Czechoslovakia, and even the nuclear powers

10 Vladislav Zubok. *With His Back Against the Wall: Gorbachev, Soviet Demise, and German Reunification// Cold War History*, Volume 14, 2014 – Issue 4. P. 619-645.

Britain and France.” Further he postulates: “If there is a common European house or home to aim for, it is not Gorbachev’s but one to the west of his and his successors’ crumbling empire... Europe ends at the Soviet border, wherever that may be.”<sup>11</sup> It would have been far more honest for Dahrendorf to say that in Europe there is a place only for one superpower “capable of killing mankind several times over” and that superpower was the United States, in fact, the key co-architect of the European project. Though, the moment Dahrendorf authored the book he might have really hoped that Europe would get rid of overseas patronage to become a foreign policy actor in its own right.

The legitimacy of an entirely West-centered policy began to be questioned in Russia in the mid-1990s, as the Western policies of rearranging Europe and the whole world were getting ever more unscrupulous. NATO’s war against Yugoslavia in 1999 was the turning point. Many Russians, even Western-minded, found stunning a situation in which rocket strikes were dealt against the capital of a European state on a pretext nearly nobody in Russia believed. Incidentally, at that moment the veil was off from the United States’ decisive role in European politics.

And yet the hope that Europe would eventually offer its embrace to Russia for equitable strategic cooperation was dying a long and painful death. The readiness for the role of an apprentice, demonstrated in the early 1990s in the early 2000s gave way to the hope Europe might be a partner in efforts to limit U.S. hegemony. In 2003, when the United States was about to invade Iraq, it seemed the idea might work. But it was just a momentary illusion. The expansion of NATO and the European Union in 2004 had serious consequences for EU-Russia relations. Inside the European Union, there emerged a firm anti-Russian coalition of Poland, Sweden and the Baltic states, which enjoyed, as would be seen in the following years, tangible support from influential forces in the old European core countries and, naturally, in the United States.

Attempts at achieving strategic cooperation with Europe in the economy exposed a number of major restrictions. The abortive attempts at purchasing stakes in Airbus and Opel, the unsuccessful participation of a private Russian company in the deal over the metallurgical giant Arcelor were a clear indication that access to technologies will remain under the strict control of the Europeans or the Americans. Russia’s leading role as a provider of energy resources was increasingly seen by the EU through the prism of security. One should acknowledge, though, that some transit countries, just recently constituent parts of the Soviet Union, and Moscow’s inability to establish smooth business relations with them contributed a great deal to the degradation of the energy dialogue between Russia and the European Union.

The EU thought it was in the position to dictate regulatory and legal rules of economic ties with Russia and to build political relations on the principle of conditionality. Russia was expected to “earn” practically each single move by the EU. The years-long saga over the coordination of a visa-free regime for short trips was the graphic example. The European side repeatedly complemented the quite reasonable technical requirements (border facilities, passport protection and readmission procedures) by either utterly unrelated matters (for instance, charge for trans-Siberian flights) or extra conditions of purely political nature—the level of

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11 Ralf Dahrendorf. *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*. Transaction Publishers, 2014, pp.120.

democracy in Russia, etc. In the end, the negotiations of the matter dropped to nothing. In the meantime, many in Russia and in Europe agreed that a breakthrough towards visa-free trips would bring about not only economic benefits but a far more favorable mutual climate and enhance the drive for a rapprochement.

Generally speaking, Russia-EU relations in the era of “strategic partnership”—that is what they were officially called after the signing in 1994 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement—were rather odd. In its relations with Russia, the European Union employed the model applied to aspirant countries. In other words, the partner was expected to get adjusted to the institution, and not the other way round. But Russia never laid claim to membership of the European Union and it never imagined such an option might be possible. Accordingly, it remained extremely curious why it should unilaterally adjust itself to the norms and rules proposed by the European Union, while the latter never considered some other ways of cooperation as possible options. The European Commission’s most lavish offer was the concept expressed by its president, Romano Prodi, who in 2002 called for sharing with Russia “everything but the institutions”. In political parlance this meant that Moscow would have to agree to the EU’s regulations without having the slightest chance of influencing it.

As a result, the positive agenda ran dry. The Eastern Partnership program turned into a tool of geopolitical struggle between the West and Russia. The 2014 standoff came as a logical finale of these processes.

Throughout the period of “strategic partnership” between Russia and the European Union there never existed “ordinary” trading and economic relations that would be determined exclusively by the partners’ benefit and the ability to present convincing arguments at tough negotiations. Ties were invariably locked inside some broad political or ideological framework, they were expected to serve the purpose of creating comprehensive interdependence according to EU’s matrix, but without formal integration. This harmed both the economy and politics. Say, such basic elements of the European system of values absolutely crucial to Russia as rule of law and respect for the basic human rights and freedoms, when offered in one package with the openness of markets, provoked rejection of the whole set of “European values.” With time Moscow’s annoyed response turned into a conceptual attitude.

**Over the 25 years that followed the Cold War and the decline of Soviet government, Russian society raced through the same stages that Russian thought had gone through back in the 19th century.** It has gone all the way from consent to the role of an apprentice and the hope for early accession to common structures to the search for partners in the Old World for implementing the concept of a multipolar world, to the hope for partnership that would help modernize the Russian economy and eventually evolve into an economic symbiosis of the EU and Russia, and, finally, to the understanding that the strategic objective of becoming part of Europe is unattainable. The elites’ rational awareness that no strategic prospects exist on the European track is combined today with Russians’ growing emotional estrangement from Europe. Opinion polls of the past two years have for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union indicated that a majority of the population has a negative attitude to the European Union.

## A Great Power: What Does It Mean?

Naturally, discovering Europe anew by no means implies scrupulously walking the very same road. The beginning of the 21st century is greatly different from the eve of World War I. Russia spent the 20th century on the Soviet experiment, bloody and wasteful. It had to mobilize colossal resources to resist first the German bloc and then the Anglo-Saxon one that pressed for world hegemony. In both cases the country did not surrender. Its resources today are far more moderate than those the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union had at their disposal in their day. The burden of maintaining the “internal” and “external” empire has eased, though, too. Europe has changed. It has stopped to be the center of the world, the source of geopolitical power and, in many respects, an independent geopolitical actor, ceding that role to the United States.

The ambitions of some European leaders, who at the end of the 20th century hoped for building their own center of influence, comparable to the United States and China, have proved futile. The EU’s hope that “soft” power will earn it the status of a world leader today looks utterly groundless. United Europe rather tries, with very slim chances to succeed, to regain the ability to generate “hard” power on its own.

Russia’s attempts to find in Europe some partners for a concert of great powers and to build a 19th-century-style balance of power were hopeless because in Europe there are no great powers but NATO, and inside the alliance the European allies are assigned backstage roles. **This means that Russia is unable to become a great power in the traditional sense, as a member of a concert of great powers, for the simple reason there is none.**

In the meantime, as it turned out in 2014, the conviction that Russia should be a great power again has cemented the ruling quarters and a majority of the population. Putin and his entourage demonstrated they were prepared to enter into a confrontation with the West. The effects of this were manifold. In a sense, it was the Kremlin’s response to the nationalists’ criticism of the ruling elite for its degeneration to the level of a comprador clique entirely dependent on its “Western patrons.” It has turned out that the theme of “dignity” and ability to firmly resist the West, when the latter encroaches on that dignity, is of crucial importance for many of those who lost the comfort of running their businesses from Geneva or London after sanctions were introduced and for those who barely make ends meet after the ruble’s slump.

Yet the question “What does it mean to be a great power?” needs clarification today. Getting back into the realities of the 19th century, to the concert of great powers is impossible. Trying to integrate with the West while retaining a special status is unrealistic. Abortive were Russia’s plans for becoming an independent center of integration in the post-Soviet space.

Russian irredentism—an attempt to come to the rescue of Russian compatriots outside the borders of today’s Russia—might serve as another ideological driver for expansion. This argument was clearly articulated in 2014 and 2015. Of late, the Kremlin stopped using it, though, largely because it must have realized how hard it is to control ethnic nationalism, in fact, the sole unexhausted ideological resource.

The people who dream of restoring imperial greatness by force are far away from the governing machinery. Expansionism and revisionism are not the driving forces of Russian politics and they enjoy no support from an overwhelming majority of the population. This is still so

despite persistent efforts by different players who have been trying to make Russian irredentist nationalism an influential factor for the past ten years.

It should be remembered that the emotional and intellectual roots of Russian irredentism are deep, stretching as far back as the 19th century. The Soviet nationalities policy rejected the idea of the Russian national territory that developed in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century, when the process of forming a greater Russian nation, embracing all Eastern Slavs, was afoot inside the Russian Empire. With the collapse of the Soviet project those ideas came to the fore again. When Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his work *How We Should Arrange Russia* (1990)<sup>12</sup> tried to determine the contours of the core territory that should have stayed intact in the process of the Soviet Union's breakup, his concept appeared practically identical to the vision of the Russian national territory that dominated Russian imagination on the eve of World War I. (An important exception was Western Ukraine. Solzhenitsyn maintained that Galicia, which the Russian Empire tried to annex during World War I as "indigenously Russian land" and which Stalin in 1939 took over as "indigenously Ukrainian land," should be expelled from the Russian world as a hopelessly hostile society.)<sup>13</sup>

The task of steering clear of the risks related with renewed attempts at implementing the irredentist idea is becoming one of the key ones for Russia itself and for the states that make up the post-Soviet space. The example of Ukraine shows that the wish to break up political and economic ties with Russia, to cardinaly reorient oneself to other centers of influence markedly inflate the risk of Russian irredentism in the countries with large Russian diasporas. For instance, for Kazakhstan participation in the Eurasian Economic Union project and the prevention of Kazakh ethnic nationalists from rising to power is a guarantee of territorial integrity and of the possibility to retain the northern regions inhabited by ethnic Russians. Conversely, the destabilization of Kazakhstan that might create risks for ethnic Russians would entail extremely precarious political effects not only for Kazakhstan, but for Russia as well, for the latter would face the need to provide an irredentist response.

Eurasianism was one of the most significant intellectual trends of the 20th century and it will be inevitably present in the forthcoming discussions. After all, Eurasia is becoming a focal point of global political and a powerful center of economic and political development. Russia's significant role in it is beyond doubt. Regrettably, the current version of the Eurasian idea is a blend of primitive understanding of imperialness, some elements of irredentism, aggressive anti-Westernism and reactionist interpretation of geopolitics. In the meantime, the country needs something different—a concept of creative endeavor, geoeconomic above all, aimed at breathing new vigor into the vast territory lying from Europe to Southeast Asia, and doing so in cooperation with China, above all, and with other countries of the region. This kind of approach can serve as a fresh impetus to Russia's rise

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12 Alexander Solzhenitsyn. *How We Should Arrange Russia*. (in Russian)

13 It is noteworthy that the Common Economic Space, this primary sketch of integration that would eventually evolve into the Eurasian Economic Union, in shape coincided with Solzhenitsyn's own ideas—Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. In other words, it was an attempt to employ economic methods to avoid a split of the kernel and to recreate on the modern basis a common center of development. Kiev's stance upset this project.

and protect it from the temptation to embark on a hopelessly doomed revanchist policy in Eastern Europe.

National dignity and the status of a sovereign player is the indisputable value for the elites and a majority of the population, which is not surprising in a country that has not lost sovereignty over the past four centuries. No other European nation, except for Britain, has such an achievement to its credit. (In the United Kingdom's relationship with united Europe the habit of enjoying the status of a sovereign player has played a large role).

Dmitry Trenin maintains that Russia is a great power not because it is capable of controlling others or making them accept its norms, rules and solutions, but because it has a high level of self-sufficiency and innate resistibility to external effects. Also, and this is very important, because it possesses the fundamental capabilities to generate global public benefits, such as international security, international justice and international mediation.<sup>14</sup> Such interpretation is not generally accepted in Russia, but it seems to demonstrate the correct course—away from any “doom,” be it everlasting imperialness and, consequently, disposition to never-ending revanche and conflicts with neighbors or inevitable involvement in somebody else's project. The objective parameters of the modern world as they are, the role of a capable “free agent” may turn out very attractive.

## Is Russia Not Europe?

Russia's modern look at Europe in the public space is confined to three formulas. The Westernizers have turned into a marginal group in terms of public support, but they still hold influential positions in the mass media and in the Cabinet's economic segment. The current state of affairs for them is tantamount to departure from the correct “European” way. They presume that relations with the West have exhausted the positive agenda only for a short while, that they will regain it before long somehow and Russia will get back on the track of “integration” with the still West-centered global economy. But in most cases such forecasters do not even dare speculate when this may happen or how.

Another formula sometimes used to describe relations with Europe suggests considering Russia as “another Europe.” Up until the Ukrainian crisis this discourse in fact enjoyed an official status. In all of his policy statements from 1999 to 2013 President Vladimir Putin pointed out that Russia was an integral cultural, historical and political part of Europe, although with time he increasingly emphasized that within one European civilization there are different trends and unification is impermissible.<sup>15</sup>

Among the advocates of the “Another Europe” idea there are many who fear that an end to the “European orientation” will be fraught with a surge in authoritarian trends inside the

14 Dmitry Trenin. *Russia and the World in the 21st Century*. Moscow, Publishing House E, 2015, p. 94 (in Russian).

15 It is noteworthy that in the article *Nationalization of the Future*, published in the fall of 2007 (after Vladimir Putin's well-remembered Munich speech and the aggravation of relations that followed) the then architect of Russia's domestic policy Vladislav Surkov wrote: “Not dropping out from Europe, sticking to the West is essential for constructing Russia.”



country. It is very unlikely (at least the whole experience after the Cold War doesn't prove it) that persistent assertion of Russia's affiliation with Europe may boost the chances its political institutions will follow the democratic path of development (in particular, because the very same institutions of the European Union are in crisis). In the meantime, all problems concerning the Eurocentrism of identity discourse in this particular case remain—**the status of “another Europe” has to be asserted in relations with “main Europe”**. It can be postulated that this stance leaves in place all psychological traps and complexes of Eurocentrism, which have for so many years inspired Russia's resentment towards the West.

The European Union's just-adopted global strategy and resolutions by NATO's Warsaw Summit present Russia precisely as a strategic challenge, in other words, as a constitutive Other, which it has been for the European identification projects at least for the past three centuries. Our modern attempts at proving that there is “another Europe,” of which Russia is an embodiment, repeat, sometimes in an amusing way, the train of Russian 19th-century thought, its quest for a kindred Europe of “holy miracles»” or, as some would put it today, “traditional values.” At each particular moment in time there emerged an obstruction in the form of Europe in its current “unsatisfactory” condition.

Possibly for the first time ever in Russian history, the “Russia is not Europe” sentiment prevails in society. There are grounds to believe that this is a stable trend, and not a short-term response to the worsening of relations with the West. One of the reasons for this is the West itself, firstly, is drifting away from an expansionist strategy to locking itself up inside the perimeter fence and, secondly, losing the “monopoly on progress” amid the rise of other development centers.

Europe has always been Russia's source for borrowing technologies and a benchmark in building its system of science and education. The crisis of the Communist project actualized the understanding of Europe as a social and political model to follow, specifically in such areas as the rule of law, representative democracy and social state. Now Russia has developed a conviction that the West has stopped being the sole possible source of science and technology innovations to borrow. Besides, it often restricts the opportunities for borrowing for political reasons. The social state is being dismantled right in front of our eyes and the Russian elites can be recognized as the best disciples in this respect. The experience of post-Communist societies has demonstrated that the democratic system can achieve stability only in those countries which have been granted membership of the “Western club,” while the “democratization” of peripheral societies often becomes a tool of their destabilization or subjugation.

The centuries of Russian Eurocentrism have left many other traces apart from resentment and disappointment. Russia has learnt and inventively developed many elements of the European civilization. Europe and Russia can be good neighbors and formulate a new positive agenda for mutual relations. But Europe will have to recognize that its dialogue with Russia will have to be revised. Not because the apprentice has mastered all skills (or not mastered them at all). This is not the key issue any more. The simple reason is **there is no apprentice as he no longer wants to be a member of the guild and achieve the guild's recognition**. At the same time it has no intention to lay claim to the role of an instructor, contrary to what happened in the Soviet era. After Europe gets bored with the currently prevailing “barbarian at the gate” discourse, it will have to think what it can do to enrich its discursive strategies regarding Russia.

In modern Russian debates about the future two aspects clearly stand out that indicate that the previous identity discourses are now clear of Eurocentrism. As a matter of fact, the new approaches begin there where some habitual psychological stereotypes are dropped.

Firstly, Russians have invariably considered the future in terms of catch-up development. Admission to Europe was declared as the ultimate goal of this race and the country's own progress was invariably compared with Europe's. In that respect Russians and people in other post-Communist countries thought alike. These days this is obviously not so. It is clear that the lack of common projects and conditions for their emergence in the near future will make this new vision of Europe habitual and customary. It is not a matter of likes and dislikes, it is about whether Europe will take central or peripheral place in Russians' ideas of their own future.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, the catch-up development doctrine went hand in hand with the widely spread image of a "departing train" and resulted in a mighty synergy with the mobilization instinct, so characteristic of the Soviet mentality. Post-Communist Russia feels the very same innate existential fears of "missing one's chance" that are so important in the collective mentality of smaller East European nations. These motives are still present in public debate, but no longer dominate them.

## The "Nation-State" Mirage and Other Internal Development Unknowns

Some experts, including Dmitry Trenin, postulate that time is ripe for Russia to launch its own national project of the 21st century. "Russia is in dire need for creative nationalism, blended into the global context... a nationalism of enlightened action focused on Russia's development... ruling out the country's self-isolation, its confrontation with other countries and arrogant or hostile attitude to other nations."<sup>17</sup> In many respects Trenin does have a point. Firstly, the focus should be shifted from the "nationalism of battlefield victories," cultivated in the 20th century, to the patriotic motivation of creative endeavor in different spheres of life: local self-government, small and medium business, science, healthcare, education and nature conservation. Secondly, the establishment of the rule of law as a key prerequisite essential for any success. Russia's failure on this track is most evident in the post-Communist period.

Some components of the outlined program may be in harmony with the views of Russian traditionalists and Westernizers. For instance, at this point it will be hard to tell what Russia will need more in addressing vital ecological problems—Russian traditionalism or reliance

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16 A version of the moderately positive forecast of relations is found in the abstract of Council on Foreign and Defense Policy titled «Стратегия для России. Российская внешняя политика: конец 2010-х – начало 2020-х годов»: (A Strategy for Russia. Russian Foreign Policy: The late 2010s and early 2020s (in Russian)). «In relations with Europe for the coming decades one should proceed from the assumption that it is no longer a model, but still more so not a threat. A close culture and a partner in economic and humanitarian interaction. For now we have drifted apart, but a new rapprochement is desirable and possible, as Russia develops towards a more diversified political and economic system, and Europe moves towards greater conservatism and realism and away from democratic messianism.

17 Trenin, p. 92

on the European strategies of ecological regeneration, which have been successfully implemented since the 1960s.

Trenin's key idea, though, is that of a "Russian nation-state" as the goal of development. **Perception of the nation-state as a norm can be regarded as one of the examples of uncritical Eurocentrism of modern Russian political thought.** In reality, any model of a nation-state where only one ethnic group perceives the state as its own, while guaranteeing the protection of minority rights to everybody else is inapplicable in Russia. The specific features of the Soviet legacy, in particular, the institutionalization and territorial enshrinement of ethnicity leave no chance of building a nation-state. Russians account for more than 80 percent of the population, which exceeds by far the number of titular groups in many nation-states, and Russian ethnic nationalism is a force that cannot be diluted in a pan-Russian (*Rossiiskii*) project, the way it was within the framework of the Soviet project. At the same time, there are politically mobilized non-Russian groups, each having its own clearly formulated ideas of their status as a nation and their national territory, and each having its own republican autonomy. A nation-state built entirely upon Russian identity is unacceptable to them.

Attempts at creating a nation-state in a situation like this may entail dire effects. In recent years political science was working on a state-nation model (as an alternative to nation-state) in which the design of political structures should match a situation involving two or more politically mobilized groups that identify themselves as nations.<sup>18</sup> Some elements of this model can be applied in Russia. Apparently, the issue on the agenda should be some asymmetrical federative structure, capable of combining *Russkost'* ("Russianness") and *Rossiiskost'* ("Russianism"). It is telling that foreign languages lack vocabulary to describe these Russian realities.

Russia's religious, ethnic and territorial heterogeneity has certain foreign policy consequences. On the one hand, Russia will inevitably be more vulnerable to destabilizing external influences, above all, in its Muslim regions. On the other, such polyvalence may provide strong arguments in cooperation with partners of different cultures and confessions. Some examples of this factor being at work could be observed in Russia's policies over the past few years, when the heads of regions addressed certain tasks in the international scene in coordination with the Kremlin.

Way ahead is the task of creating a stable model of the Russian state, in which the issues of political and civil participation and equality will be effectively controlled within the legal space, and not resolved primarily through mutual blackmail between the center and the periphery and ad hoc measures. Here one finds only one of the many components of a large equation expected to describe a yet-to-be created strategy of the country's socio-economic development. This is a complex task, and it is hard to say where the answers to these questions can be found. It is clear, though, that a tight peg to the European experience, likewise to the Eurocentric identity discourse, will merely make solutions harder to find.

Since the early 2010s Russia has seen a lively debate over its own set of basic principles society should rest upon as an alternative to the "European values" the European Union has been pressing for. No integral concept, specific and having applied uses (like its European counter-

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18 See writings of Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz.

part) has been formulated yet, while the emphasis on traditionalism as a rule leads back to the above-mentioned discourse of “another, correct Europe” with all the entailing consequences. As for attempts to reconcile Russia’s quest for values with a non-Western context, for instance, achieving a common ground with other states in the BRICS group, they run into profound cultural disagreements with each of them. Even the common BRICS pathos of resistance to hegemony varies in nature from country to country: Brazil, India, South Africa and (to a smaller degree) China are pushing ahead with the anti-colonial policy of the Third World, while Russia rather feels jealous about a more successful superpower rival.

It looks like the competition in creating an alternative set of values belongs with a declining era and this is the right moment for Russia to quit the game. The country needs a flexible and “convenient” system of principles and images that would ensure the most effective system of government and create conditions for the development of the whole diversified society. Attempts to forge some special bonds, be it liberal or conservative, apart from such obvious things as justice, solidarity and equality, narrows the opportunities for development and response to the constantly changing situation. In the final count, the task of the “European values,” too, was not abstract moralizing, but creation of an optimal modern state. Europe will obviously have to revise this term and to adjust it to the new realities.

Today Europe is in the same context as Russia—the previous solutions no longer work. The future is still to be conceived of and built from scratch. Russia has not become part of Europe. The current condition of Russia and Europe and the problems facing them are considerably different. Either will be searching for future development scenarios independently of each other and the scenarios will be different.

## Not to Hurry to Catch the Train

In the coming years Russia will have to address a number of inter-connected tasks concerning its internal life and positioning itself in the world. The search for solutions should proceed from three basic principles.

Firstly, they should be developed in cold blood. **There should be no place for “the departing train” syndrome. After all, there is no way of guessing now where the train is heading.** Russia is confronted with major challenges but it surely has the knack of handling them. It found itself in a situation like this many a time in the past and it invariably succeeded in coping with the challenges.

Hegel maintained that the country’s greatness depends on its sense of measure. In the Russian context this means not just awareness of how limited one’s own capabilities are (it looks like this lesson has been learned after the breakup of the Soviet Union), but also the opposite. It is unnatural for a country that has the ability to destroy the world to become a hostage of panic, alarmism, and “besieged fortress” mentality. It is important that Russia rid itself of existential phobias that are common of smaller East European countries, of nervous reactions caused by fear, and to start building independent development strategies, long-term ones, extending for decades.

Secondly, these strategies must be fundamentally new. Russia should make use of the emerging trends towards overcoming the Eurocentrism of social thought and images of the

future that prevailed throughout the *perestroika* years. Coping with this task implies a wide public consensus on the issue of basic values. The country is at a point where neither aggressive individualism of the first post-Soviet years, nor the voracious consumerism of the “affluent years” can prevail in society any more. There is great demand for restoring the social texture, stability and social protection. This is a mandatory condition, although not a sufficient one, for building a long-term strategy of sustainable development. A type of development that will be judged not in contrast to an imaginary European level and mode of life, but a moderately decent life, available education and health care and certainty to find a job. It should be understood that the pallet of ideas is changing everywhere and Russia should stop wandering in broad daylight, reproducing over and over again the conflict between the very same dogmas—monetarism against dirigism, effectiveness against justice and so on and so forth. Only the one who will manage to come up with a balanced convergence of all these ideas will achieve success in the modern world.

Thirdly, **it is crucially important to avoid turning the departure from Eurocentrism into a “Danilevskii moment,” in other words into the perception of Europe as an enemy.** Culturally and historically, Russia will remain largely a European country. Without the achievements of European civilization, such as the rule of law and respect for the rights of the individual success will remain unachievable. Economic cooperation with Europe will remain an essential condition for development for many years ahead. Also, Russia needs a friendly and predictable neighbor.

However, the trend towards emotional estrangement is very much present in the public space. Many political forces in Europe remain hostile either towards Russia in general or the Putin regime in particular, thus supporting the trend. This is part of the general “besieged fortress” motif, which has its rich tradition and inertia. Many aspects of modern relations between Russia and the West make it worse.

Estrangement, not emotional and impulsive, but conscious and instrumental is crucial to Russia and Europe to get out of the quick sand of insults, jealousy, groundless expectations and deceived hopes that have been amassed over the years since the Cold War. Odd as it may seem, bilateral ties require rationalization, and the latter is impossible without taking an estranged look at each other. The recent Valdai Report states that “to develop successfully, the relations should rely not on ephemeral ‘common interests and values’ ... or a rapprochement of development models, but on either party’s interests, clearly formulated and presented to the partner.”<sup>19</sup> Detachment is capable of stopping the dangerous slide towards another confrontation.

A tide of emotion and wish to prove something to Europe and America, among other things, distracts from addressing more important issues, for instance, filling the Eastern policy with meaningful content. It is fundamentally important for Moscow to do everything in its powers to overcome hysteria in relations with the West. It would make sense to stop systematically teasing and trolling the European Union and the United States and jumping at every opportunity to underscore their insincerity and double standards. The effects of this on the target

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19 *Russia and the European Union: Three Questions Concerning New Principles in Bilateral Relations.* A Report by the Valdai International Discussion Club, 2016. <http://valdaiclub.com/publications/reports/report-russia-and-the-european-union-three-questions/>

audience are equal to naught. As Beijing's experience shows, the same can be said in a far calmer way, demonstrating not jealousy or psychopathic enmity, but self-confidence and detachment.

Hypocrisy and reluctance (and sometimes inability) to call things by their proper names has proven one of the worst corrosive factors of the outgoing era. The triumph of "political correctness" in international relations has resulted in an unheard-of triumph of doublethink. The parties have lost a common language altogether, because their pictures of the world are incompatible. One can postulate that **the Russian-Western dialogue today lacks sound and open cynicism and a clear expression of one's own interests**. Russia should firmly draw certain "red lines" and make it clear that trespassing will cause imminent retaliation. Those in the West who are capable of analyzing their own mistakes have already realized that the practices of 2013-2014, when Moscow was told that Ukraine-EU relations were not its business, were in fact tantamount to stepping over such a "red line".

Russia's ability to take everybody else by surprise, thereby compensating for the scarcity of resources, was a trademark of Russian policy in recent years. Putin's unexpected moves more than once yielded considerable tactical advantages. But Russia's reputation of an unpredictable player, which may be useful in some cases, also entails noticeable costs not only in relations with the West (the United States first and foremost), but on other tracks, too. Moscow's partners in the East and the South have developed the habit of seeing Russia as a very impulsive actor, prone to sharp turns and improvisations, not very much disposed towards systemic work. At the same time many in China, India, and particularly so in Iran are certain that Asian tracks are of secondary importance to Moscow or, which is still worse, have no value of their own, being instrumental and subordinate to the main task—the struggle for the benevolence of the West. This is so today. Russia's openness on the Asian and South American tracks is seen as a forced and transient phenomenon, due to end as soon as at the next turn of the foreign policy spiral the relations with the West begin to mend.

Gaining the reputation of a reliable, constructive and long-term partner with the non-Western world is a vital need. Above all, Russian policies should assume a new quality in Asia, where it has traditionally looked for a confirmation of its affiliation with Europe. The task for the coming years is to gain a new identity in that part of the world, easily understood by Asian partners and independent from the state of relations with the Old and New World. Likewise, one must be aware that relations with the United States in the foreseeable period will be oscillating from outright confrontation to moderate mutual containment. This stems from the general logic of development and the fact that both Russia and the United States are going through complex internal transformations, and this is the least favorable time for establishing new positive bonds.

The Asian vector of Russian policies must not and will not be confined to China, but Beijing by virtue of its growing weight and influence will be the basic partner to rely on east of the Urals. As it was stated above, Russian-Chinese ties are acquiring the properties of genuinely strategic relations, first and foremost due to the common understanding of the challenges that both states are facing in the current international context. As cooperation grows, rifts and greater risks of conflicts will be inevitable—the interests of great powers are never identical, while in-depth understanding of each other and, respectively, the ability to overcome disagreements, (including those emerging in the process of inevitable economic competition) at the lowest costs possible

is still to be achieved. Special focus should be placed on training human resources, which would ensure the process of mutual adjustment.

The skill of understanding Asia correctly and working with it effectively is becoming a major competitive edge in global competition. Also, it will contribute to the creation of a balanced identity of Russia itself, elimination of its psychological peg to the West and the delusion that adequate mutual understanding will be possible only on the condition of common cultural roots. For now it is the other way round—**the shoots from one root have been growing in such different directions that the existence of a common past breeds confusion rather than helps understand each other better.**

At a time of painful transformation, with the final destination point being very unclear—and this process proceeds in parallel on the global scale and inside Russia—the maximum pragmatism and flexibility in selecting partners is required. Moscow's guideline should be this: Russia cooperates with everybody who is prepared to work for stronger order and a firmer basis for sustainable development.

Amid global unpredictability very few things are as precious as the freedom of maneuver. As the largest country in the world lying at the junction of most epoch-making processes, Russia is confronted with many challenges along its border, and it is interested in having as many different partners as possible in resisting these challenges. Departure from Eurocentrism, minimization of conflicts with neighbors and the search for an optimal combination of relations for each specific problem may be not the model of development for the whole 21st century, but surely the least costly means of living through future cataclysms and getting prepared for a more orderly phase of world history, which is bound to follow the currently starting transitional period.

The coming five years will be decisive for the next phase of Russia's development. They will show whether it is able to make a new start after it has revisited its experience, or once again slide back into the well-trodden path taking it back to the vicious circle.

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