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## On the Rostrum of the RAS Presidium

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# Russia, the United States, and Smaller Europe (the EU): Competition for Leadership in the Polycentric World

Al. A. Gromyko\*

*Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia*

*e-mail: alexey@gromyko.ru*

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**Abstract**—This article, based on a report presented by the author at a meeting of the RAS Presidium in June 2015, discusses problems associated with the “civilizational triangle” including Smaller Europe (the EU countries), Russia, and the United States. What unites these three political actors? What factors affect the dynamics of relations within this triangle? What are the competitive advantages and drawbacks of the European Union, Russia, and the United States? Finally, what are the options of the alignment of forces for the next decades?

**Keywords:** Russia, the United States, the European Union, civilizational triangle, competition, polycentric world.

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There are many serious works about the destiny of Europe, about the world in which it exists, and about momentous documents on this topic. People have been concerned with Europe-related issues over the entire period of modern and contemporary history. We may recall the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, the Congress of Vienna of 1814–1815, and the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. In 1918, the first volume of one of the most famous books about the Old World, *The Decline of the West* by O. Spengler, saw the light of day.

Let us recall the decisions of Yalta and Potsdam in 1945 and the UN Charter, signed on June 26, 1945. The Helsinki Accords of 1975 and the Paris Charter of 1990 also tried to settle Europe.

After the end of the Cold War, two concepts of the world order became most popular both in the West and in Russia: F. Fukuyama’s “end of history” and S. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations.” However, both remained largely speculative and unconfirmed by life.

The noon of the apologetics of the new form of Eurocentrism in the form of the European Union fell on the beginning of the 21st century. Let us mention *The European Dream* by J. Rifkin (2004) and *The European Superpower* by J. McCormick (2007); a realistic picture of the world and Europe’s place in it is shown in the recent work by H. Kissinger *World Order* (2014).

A number of fundamental Russian studies on the modern world order and the positions of Europe and Russia have appeared of late. In particular, these are the monographs *Russia in a Polycentric World* [1]; *Global Management: Opportunities and Risks* [2]; *Global Restructuring* [3]; and books from the multivolume series *Old World, New Times*, prepared at the RAS Institute of Europe [4].

The scientific public and politicians have also paid attention to the works by Academician A.A. Kokoshin [5], dedicated to issues of strategic stability; the monograph *Russian Europeanism* by Academician A.O. Chubar’yan [6]; the work *Globalization: A Structural Crisis and Global Leadership*, coauthored by Academicians N.A. Simoniya and A.V. Torkunov [7]; the book by Academician V.V. Zhurkin *The European Army: Defeats and Victories* [8]; and studies by the Russian International Affairs Council [9] and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations [10]. The monographs by V.A. Nikonov [11] are also among the latest publications on the history of Russia and its place in the world.

One may ask why a regional organization is put on a par with two states proper. The point is that the European Union has been seeking to imitate a federative state for a long time, while Russia and the United States are examples of states of this type. At the beginning of the 21st century, the EU practically turned into a regional organization with elements of both federation and confederation. It is the only international organization in which the volumes and spheres of supranational and interstate regulation are compara-

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\* Aleksei Anatol’evich Gromyko, Dr. Sci. (Polit.), is director of the RAS Institute of Europe.

**Table 1.** The European Union as a quasi-state system

Federation (exclusive competences of the EU)	Confederation (mixed competences)	Interstate association (competences of national governments)
Customs Union (1968)	Foreign policy	Security and defense policy
Economic and Monetary Union—eurozone (19 out of 28 member countries)	Budgetary policy (“European Semester”)	Tax policy
Single internal market (unfinished)	Banking Union	Managerial mechanisms (reservation of veto in making a number of decisions by the European Council, the summit of the leaders of the member countries)
Sectoral policies	Energy Union	Part of social policy
Aspects of social policy, especially labor and health protection	Legislative process (acquis communautaire)	
Schengen Area (with exceptions)	Immigration policy Employment policy	
Law system (primacy over national law, including constitutional law)	Area of internal freedom, security, and justice	
Own budget, euro 143 billion (2015)	Broadening of powers of national parliaments (the “yellow card” mechanism)	

ble. One may say that the EU is a quasi-state system (Table 1). Noteworthy is the fact that its different competences are not static but mobile. For the most part, the trend towards increasing confederative and federative competences is observable, although a reverse movement is also present.

What else can explain this choice of the “players”? We are speaking about the vision of European (Christian) civilization through the prism of several of its branches [12]. Among them are Russia, the EU countries, and the United States—a kind of a civilizational triangle. All its vertices come from the same historical core. Then their paths diverged to a considerable extent, but they still preserve a part of their common legacy, for example, their alliance in WWII.

A few words about the terms. *Smaller Europe* means the totality of the 28 countries that became EU members by 2015. This Europe is Smaller because it represents only a part of the Old Continent, the history of which is unimaginable without Russia, although formally Russia certainly goes beyond the notion of a *European country*. The term *Greater Europe* is more than 100 years old. It echoes the idea of the “United States of Europe” of the early 20th century, the inter-war idea of Pan-Europe, the Gaullist idea of a common European space, and the contemporary interpretations of Europe “from Lisbon to Vladivostok.”

Moreover, a common point for these three actors of world policy—Russia, the European Union (to be more exact, a number of its members), and the United States—is to work out and develop strategic thinking, which implies that each of them has a picture of the

world order of its own, as well as strong science, experienced diplomacy, significant resources, and long-standing statehood. Few will deny that Moscow, Paris, London, Berlin, and Washington historically seek and are sometimes capable of strategic thinking. However, this capability has its downside, its own risks: the more powerful the resources of a state are, the more often strategic thinking, if applied erroneously, leads to large-scale negative consequences. An illustrative confirmation is the series of US military campaigns of the early 21st century.

As for the European Union, its claims to strategic thinking still need to be developed substantially. However, it has certain experience and practices. For example, it has successfully resolved the strategic (within Europe) problem of the historical reconciliation of France and Germany. In doctrinal terms, the first and, thus far, the last European security strategy appeared in 2003. In particular, it says [13]:

As a union of 28 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world’s Gross National Product (GNP), the European Union is inevitably a global player.... Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world.... We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and, when necessary, robust intervention.

A noteworthy fact: the strategic review of 2003 uses the words *strategy* and *strategic* 13 times, while that of 2008, 18 times. Here is only one quotation from this document: “To ensure our security.. we must be ready to shape events. That means becoming more strategic

in our thinking and more effective and visible around the world” [14].

Traditionally, EU documents and addresses of EU leaders speak about strategic partnership with NATO. They have also announced such partnership with Japan, China, Canada, and India; until recently, they also mentioned Russia in this context. Among the adopted documents are the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2005); the Strategy for the External Dimension of the Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice (2005); the Information Security Strategy (2006); the Joint EU–Africa Strategy (2006); and the Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia (2007).

Obviously, the plexus of competition and cooperation between the three players is becoming stronger; as for the European Union, it, in addition, faces the growth of internal contradictions. Various forms of competition embrace all vertices of the triangle; this should be emphasized. For example, we recall 2003, when Euro-Atlantic structures were split due to controversies related to the invasion of Iraq. The Russian topic remains perhaps the only one where the traditional idea of the collective West persists, although approaches to this problem are also different even against the background of the Ukrainian crisis. Evidence includes visits to Russia by A. Merkel, F. Hollande, M. Renzi, N. Anastasiades, A. Tsipras, the presidents of Finland and the Czech Republic, and many other political leaders, to say nothing of non-European politicians.

In addition to internal interdependence in the space from Vancouver to Vladivostok, Russia, the United States, and the European Union are affected by growing influence from the outside, primarily from China, India, and Brazil. In the dynamics of the relations both among themselves and with other players, an important role belongs to the factor of national sovereignty. We mean a renaissance of the phenomenon of the nation state at the beginning of the 21st century. As opposed to the European Union, neither Russia nor the United States, nor China, nor India, nor Brazil has sought to transfer any part of their sovereignty to supranational structures (although such elements are present within the Eurasian Economic Union). However, within the European Union itself, processes of blurring the state have noticeably slowed; the evidence is, for example, the desire of Britain to regain some of its authority previously delegated to Brussels. New powerhouses, growing across the world, are for the strong nation state.

Nevertheless, crisis phenomena are observable across the world in this sphere. In the European Union, the experiment on withering the principle of state sovereignty has led to unexpected consequences and side effects. Regional nationalism and separatism strengthened in Spain, Great Britain, and Belgium. The situation is even worse in the EU periphery (in the

Balkans) and catastrophic in regions adjacent to Europe. These are the collapsing states in Africa, in the Middle East, and on the Arabian Peninsula. The United States and a number of EU member countries have played a malign role by stirring the already fragile state structures from the outside, including militarily.

Over the last several decades, globalization has been working toward “drawing” states together, for their interpenetration and intertwining. It is enough to recall the trading boom of the 1990s—the early 2000s in the relations between Russia and the European Union. However, this process also has its counterforce—regional integration, which, like gravity, pushes territorially close countries toward one another. In other words, here we deal with the everlasting “tyranny of geography.” The result is the paradox of our times, the necessity to be the core of a regional integrative project to promote one’s interests successfully. For example, Germany obtained unquestionable advantages owing to the fact that it de facto became the economic core of the European Union.

The newest trend of history is megaintegrative projects, or integrations of integrations. To an extent, such projects were created before as well, for example, in the form of NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the Nonaligned Movement, etc. However, they were a response to the bipolar world and were largely determined by political and ideological reasons. At present, four superprojects are being lobbied: the Trans-Pacific Partnership of 22 Pacific Rim countries, headed by the United States; the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the United States and the European Union; the Free Trade Area in the Pacific Rim, headed by China; and the Silk Road Economic Belt, also headed by China. Russia either stands aloof from such projects (in which the United States and the European Union enjoy the upper hand) or has unclear prospects of participation in the projects in which the locomotive is China.

Another factor that greatly affects the dynamics of relations within this triangle is the “sliding,” shifting character of the center(s) of globalization. For several centuries until 1945, the world was Eurocentric; until the early 1990s, it was bipolar in favor of the United States and the Soviet Union; until 2001, we observed a United States—run unipolar world; and then the polycentric world began to gain momentum under the preserved hierarchy (multistoriedness) of states, when the center of influence shifted to the Pacific (to be more exact, to the Indo-Pacific) Rim.

What are the similarity and difference between the three distant “civilizational relatives”?

Let us present the basic indicators by population and territory. The “three vertices of the triangle” are, in different successions, among the first ten countries of the world (Table 2). By population, the line “Euro-

**Table 2.** Basic indicators of the leading countries of the world

Country	Territory, million square kilometers		Population, million people	
Russia	17	(1)	142	(10)
Canada	9.98	(2)	35	(39)
United States	9.8	(3)	318.9	(4)
China	9.596	(4)	1.355	(1)
Brazil	8.514	(5)	202.6	(5)
Australia	7.741	(6)	22.7	(56)
European Union	4.325	(7)	512	(3)
			80.9	(18) Germany
			66.2	(22) France
			63.7	(23) Britain
			61.6	(24) Italy
India	3.287	(8)	1.236	(2)

Rating positions are enclosed in brackets.

**Table 3.** Basic indicators of different countries of the world in 2014, dollars

Country	PPP GDP, trillion		Exchange rate GDP, trillion		Per capita GDP, thousand		Change in the GDP vs. 2013 +/- (%)	
China	17.63	(1)	10.36	(3)	12.9	(113)	7.4	(14)
EU	17.61	(2)	18.4	(1)	38.3	(42)	1.4	(171)
United State	17.46	(3)	17.42	(2)	54.8	(19)	2.4	(131)
India	7.277	(4)	2.048	(11)	5.8	(160)	5.6	(43)
Japan	4.807	(5)	4.77	(4)	37	(43)	1.3	(173)
Germany	3.621	(6)	3.8	(5)	44.7	(27)	1.4	(165)
Russia	3.456	(7)	2.057	(10)	24.8	(69)	0.5	(196)
Brazil	3.073	(8)	2.244	(8)	15.2	(101)	0.3	(198)
France	2.587	(9)	2.9	(6)	40.4	(39)	0.4	(197)
Indonesia	2.554	(10)	0.856	(12)	10.6	(133)	5	(51)
Britain	2.435	(11)	2.848	(7)	37.3	(44)	3.2	(101)
Italy	2.066	(12)	2.129	(9)	34.5	(49)	-0.2	(202)

Source: CIA World Factbook 2015. Rating positions are enclosed in brackets.

pean Union” shows the sample of leading member states. By the purchasing power parity (PPP) GDP and by the exchange rate GDP, they are also among the first ten leading countries (Table 3). The per capita GDP moves them much farther from one another, although the respective indicators are comparable in this respect too, including the fact that a number of EU countries are behind Russia (Russia is in 69th place; Poland, in 72nd; Hungary, in 73rd; Latvia, in 75th; Romania, in 85th; and Bulgaria, in 93rd). By GDP negative dynamics, the most unfortunate EU countries in 2014 were Finland (-0.2%), Croatia (-0.8%), and Cyprus (-3.4%).

The PPP GDP of 21 countries exceeds \$1 trillion (\$82 trillion in total), but only 9 of them are part of the traditional notion *the West*. The European Union is

represented by Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Spain; the other four countries are the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia. The remaining non-Western countries, including Russia, enjoy 54% of the GDP (\$45 trillion).

In the European Union’s foreign trade, the share of Russia in 2014 was 8.4%, i.e., third place after the United States (15%) and China (14%) (Table 4). In the US foreign trade, the share of Russia is 1% and that of China, 2%. For Russia, the European Union is the largest trade partner, while the United States is in 20th place.

At the beginning of 2015, the share of the European Union in Russia’s foreign trade was 46%, or around €285 billion, while the share of China was about 11%,

or around \$90 billion. The trade turnover between the United States and Russia is less than \$30 billion, while that between the EU and the United States is €515 billion and that between the EU and China, €467 billion. From this point of view, the “gravity” that pushes Russia to the EU is still several times higher than the gravity that drags it to China, not to mention the United States.

The Ukrainian crisis changed the situation. In 2014, the trade turnover between Russia and the EU dropped by 10% compared to 2013 and is still declining. However, the picture varies from country to country. For example, mutual trade with Britain in 2014 decreased by several tens of percent, while that with Bulgaria and Malta increased by 1–2%. Russia’s turnover with non-European countries was mostly increasing: by 30% with Mexico, by 86% with Egypt, by 7% with China, and by 6% with the United States.

The European Union is passing through a very difficult stage of its history, which does not exclude either backward movement or the fragmentation of the Eurozone.

In the first quarter of 2015, the GDP of the Eurozone’s countries increased by 0.4%. Three EU countries were still in recession (Finland, Croatia, and Cyprus) despite the fact that the European Central Bank (ECB) began a large-scale quantitative easing program in an amount of more than \$1 trillion. The EU’s leading countries were teetering on the brink of recession: the GDP growth in Britain was 0.3%; that of France, 0.6%; that of Italy (after three years of recession), 0.3%; and that of Germany, 0.3% (0.7% in the fourth quarter of 2014).

The EU has not, thus far, outlined a solution to two other hazardous problems of its members, namely, deflation and unemployment. During 2014, prices in Europe remained in the subzero zone under an ECB-set target of 2%. Unemployment exceeds 12%, on average; the situation is especially dramatic in Spain (about 25%) and in Greece (about 30%). The situation is most desperate for young people under 25 years of age. For example, in Italy, more than 40% of young people are unemployed.

A separate line shows the problem of immigration. In 2014, the number of illegal migrants alone in the EU reached almost 300 000 people. In 2015, the situation became worse, and by fall the number of illegal immigrants and refugees on the territory of the European Union exceeded 700 000 people.

The competitive advantages and drawbacks of Russia, the European Union, and the United States are shown in Tables 5 and 6.

What options of the alignment of forces can develop in the triangle under consideration? There are five options (with account for their conditionality).

**Table 4.** The European Union’s leading trade partners in 2014

Country	Billion dollars	%
United States	552	15.2
China	467	13.8
Russia	285	8.4
Switzerland	237	7.0
Norway	134	4.0
Turkey	129	3.8
Japan	108	3.2
South Korea	82	2.4
India	73	2.1
Total	\$ 3.383 trillion	100

Source: European Union, Trade with World. European Commission, Directorate General for Trade, 10-04-2015.

(1) *The convergence of Russia and the EU (Greater Europe)* against the background of the decline of the American Dream in the form known in the 20th century. The main obstacles are the lack of a full-fledged political subjectivity of the European Union and significant anti-Russian sentiments in a number of EU countries. In this respect, the stake may be on the multi-speed track on which the European Union develops its common foreign policy. Just as in its internal development, the EU paid increasingly greater attention to “two-speed” approach (for example, the creation of the Schengen Area, the Eurozone, the banking union, etc.), under which some countries became the “core” of a certain process, while others remained in its “periphery,” this principle could possibly play a positive role in the common foreign policy as well, including relations between Russia and the EU.

(2) The continuation of the *convergence between the European Union and the United States* if the contradictions between Russia and a certain part of the West escalate to structural confrontation. Its prevention largely depends on both external factors and Russia itself, which should move towards modernization and should increase its attractiveness by a number of parameters. The main obstacles in the way towards the above convergence are the American messianic attitude and, at the same time, sufficiently strong America-skeptical, up to anti-American, moods within the European Union. Washington’s interest in the situation in Europe has also been dropping for a long time. The negotiations about the transatlantic trade and investment partnership and the revival of NATO’s activities in Europe against the background of the Ukrainian crisis slowed this tendency but will hardly reverse this trend in the medium term. The possibility that the US presidency will go to a figure with a “suite” that will again include neoconservatives may add

**Table 5.** Competitive advantage

Competition sphere	United States	Smaller Europe (EU)	Russia
Foreign policy	Favorable geopolitical position, nuclear status, military strength, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the NATO leader	Certain achievements of “soft power” politics, the nuclear status of France and Britain, their membership in the UN Security Council, the development of the European External Action Service	Advantages of the geopolitical position, multivector nature of its foreign policy, nuclear status, a permanent member of the UN Security Council
Economy	Strong sides of the Anglo-Saxon model of development, economic dynamism, world’s reserve currency	Successful (until recently) model of the social market, preservation of a high (on average) level of well-being in the crisis period	Natural and energy resources and the space, nuclear, and military industries
Society	Demographic growth, sufficiently successful experience of multiculturalism	Public goods based on the “pool of sovereignties” and the principle of “social cohesion”	Rich experience of intercultural, interconfessional, and intercivilizational interaction
Ideology	Residual appeal of the American Dream, attempts to use “smart power”	Persistence of the relative attractiveness of the “European Dream” (J. Derrida, J. Habermas, and others)	Reputation of the world’s space, nuclear, energy, military, scientific, sports power; use of active “soft” and “smart” power
Other	Domination in informational and financial space, pop culture, the English language	Potential of the principles of solidarity and sustainable development	Potential of the transport corridor Europe–Asia and the Northeast Passage

**Table 6.** Competitive drawbacks

Competition sphere	United States	Smaller Europe (EU)	Russia
Foreign policy	One-sided foreign policy, excessive reliance on “hard power”	Poorly developed strategic thinking and low autonomy as a political and military player	Foreign-policy ambitions not supported by respective economic strength
Economy	Drawbacks of the Anglo-Saxon model of development: the outsized financial sector, unsecured liquidity, and the debt-based economy	Motley socioeconomic models of the EU member countries, unevenness of internal socioeconomic development, weak sides of the Eurozone	One-legged structure of the economy, monopolism, and oligarchic character
Society	Low social protection and deepening social inequality	Demographic problems, uncontrolled immigration, growth of Islamic and other extremisms	High level of social inequality, decrease in the population to the east of the Urals
Ideology	Messianic mindset, hubris, narrow interpretation of national interests	Overstretch in the process of expansion, democratic deficit, intricate bureaucracy	Negative image of Russia in the West, caused by both its internal problems and manipulations with anti-Russian sentiments
Other	Decrease in influence across the world, strong anti-American sentiments, internal political polarization	“National egoisms,” fragility of the dualistic supranational/interstate nature of the EU	Corruption, the necessity to improve the quality of public administration

momentum to the return of the EU towards the autonomy of its foreign policy.

(3) A new “reset,” *the convergence of the United States and Russia* against the background of a decrease in the attractiveness of the European integrative project and the growth of global problems requiring

cooperation of superpowers. The main obstacle is the above-mentioned American messianic mindset, deep-rooted anti-Russian feelings in the United States, and the low economic interdependence of Moscow and Washington. However, recent events, including the success of the negotiations between G6 and Iran, the new window of opportunities in struggle against ISIS

in Syria with the participation of Russian military specialists and equipment, and the negotiations of the Russian and American presidents on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 29, 2015, show that the idea of the “Concert of Powers” can surface from time to time even in the 21st century.

(4) *Interaction between the three vertices* of the triangle approximately on a parity basis with the joining of other large states, for example, on the platform of the OSCE, G20, or the UN Security Council. The main obstacles are described in options 1–3. However, this scenario can also be implemented on the condition of positive developments in relations between Russia and the European Union or Russia and the United States. In this case, the third partner would probably incline to adapt to the new tendency rather than to resist it. The factor of strengthening of China will also work for building smooth relations between major powers. Global and, hence, common challenges in the form of terrorism, climate change, further space exploration, uncontrolled migration, etc., will push all the above actors of international relations towards interaction.

(5) *Drift of all from all*. Just like option 2, this scenario is least favorable for Russia due to its position in the international division of labor and the undesirable restriction of the room for maneuvering to an exclusively eastern direction. No doubt, strengthening strategic cooperation with China will be one of pillars of Russia’s strategy in the international arena in the 21st century; however, accounting for the developing imbalances between the two countries, it will be important for worldwide stability under the conditions of the polycentric world to stick to a more balanced system of interrelations that would exclude the opposition of one group of states and organizations to others.

Each of these five options has prospects, although with different probabilities. As usual, in practice, the processes will develop with elements of all of them. The point is which of these elements will dominate and which will be of secondary importance. It is in Russia’s interests that options of convergence should not be exclusive and that the drift apart should not be irreversible. Just like in the case with market relations, limitless self-regulation was recognized as a harmful myth long ago. To make the “set of ingredients” in the international relations of the current century balanced and universally acceptable, we should not rely on tactical maneuvering, immediate benefits, and autopilot. Political will, strategic vision, pragmatism, and abandoning national egoisms are the most important preconditions of all the components of European civilization in this world of high risks.

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