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# Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences

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## Wellbeing Discourses in an Environment of “Unsustainable Development”: Bridging the Past and the Future

I. S. Semenenko<sup>a,\*</sup> and T. I. Khaynatskaya<sup>a,\*\*,#</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Primakov National Research Institute of the World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

\* e-mail: [semenenko@imemo.ru](mailto:semenenko@imemo.ru)

\*\* e-mail: [tkhaynatskaya@gmail.com](mailto:tkhaynatskaya@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**—Recent developments in expert discourse regarding transformations of the welfare state and its future are discussed. The research field embraces international organizations’ visions and national strategic program documents of members of the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (New Zealand, Scotland, Iceland, Wales, and Finland), international rankings data, expert discussion papers, and research literature. The wellbeing economy model—the key focus in this discussion—is part of the sustainable development framework, and its advocates and supporters seek to contribute to the mainstream discourse on development. These models are now facing severe systemic limitations, due to emerging challenges in the context of resource scarcity and growing international and political tensions. Promoting universal models appears to be an unsustainable challenge; in an international environment of “unsustainable development,” a reference framework for development relies on a diversity of approaches to progress in wellbeing and on principles encompassing a dialogic culture and on responsible commitment.

**Keywords:** discourse, social state, welfare state, welfare, wellbeing, wellbeing economy, “wellbeing budget,” political-environmental discourses, sustainable development, responsible development

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The concept of “sustainable development” has been around for more than three decades. Since the work of the Brundtland Commission,<sup>1</sup> which formulated the development agenda “without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,”<sup>2</sup> new approaches have appeared in the public debate aimed at solving the multivalued task of “a future for all.” It suffices to recall the infamous “third way”—the course adopted by the British Laborites and politicians of several other Western countries towards the synthesis of neoliberal economic attitudes and elements of the welfare state, justified and popularized by

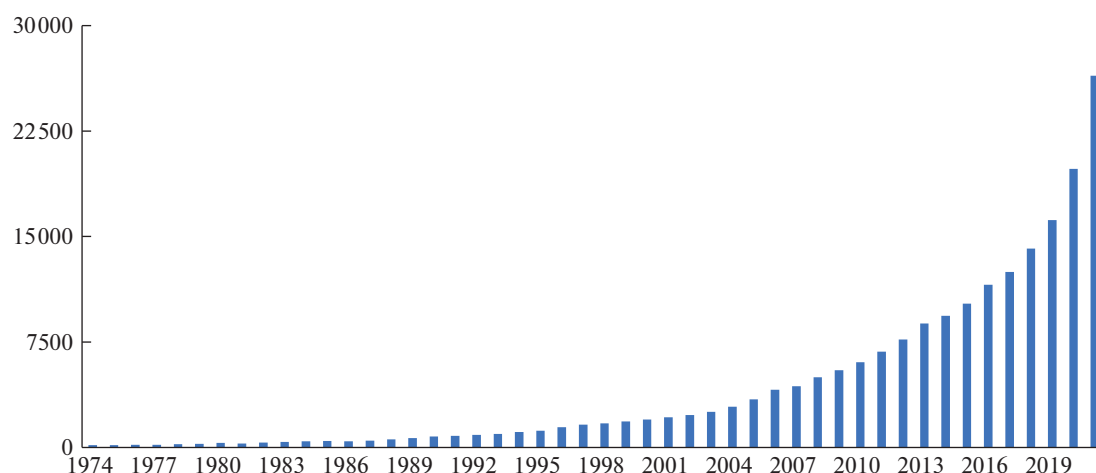
Anthony Giddens and his associates [Giddens, 1990; 1998]. The “new communitarianism,” the principles of which were developed in the widely known works of Amitai Etzioni [Etzioni, 1993; 1997], focused on promoting the ideal of communities united by common moral principles and creative social practices. The work of Elinor Ostrom [Ostrom, 1990], the first female winner of the Bank of Sweden Prize in Economics (Nobel Prize, 2009), drew attention to this dimension at the same time. Another dimension is corporate social responsibility strategies and “corporate citizenship” models for business, which have been transformed into today’s popular “environmental, social, and corporate governance” criteria (ESG). Like variations of the “green transition”—an invariable part of the modern political agenda of the West and the unprecedented scale of the “green” lobby business project—these ideas were correlated with the philosophy of sustainable development within the “new capitalism” model. According to the beliefs of its supporters, the prospects for the notorious “end of history” were opening.

Reflecting on the path taken over 30 years, one cannot but agree with the conclusion that this slogan, popular at the end of the millennium, in reality marked “the beginning of the end of the global hierar-

<sup>#</sup> RAS Corresponding Member Irina Stanislavovna Semenenko, Dr. Sci. (Polit.), is Deputy Director for Research of the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, and Head of the Center for Comparative Socioeconomic and Political Studies at the same institute. Tatiana Igorevna Khaynatskaya is a Junior Researcher at the Center for Comparative Socioeconomic and Political Studies, Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>1</sup> Named after Gro Harlem Brundtland, the head of the World Commission on Environment and Development at the UN, the then leader of the Norwegian Labor Party, and the Prime Minister of Norway.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, 1987).



**Fig. 1.** Number of publications on wellbeing in Scopus Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of summary data of publications included in the bibliographic and abstract database of the Scopus scientific literature.

chy of political concepts of the West, which centered on societies that identified themselves as market liberal democracies” [Martyanov, 2021, p. 112]. The existing conceptual consensus is collapsing before our eyes, not only due to clear transformations in the structure of the world order but also under the influence of radical changes in social and cultural norms that regulate social relations in Western societies and from where this consensus originates. The landmarks of the desired future, the very possibility of finding an overall direction of political and sociocultural development for communities that differ in their political culture and resource endowment, are under question.

Western societies ideally perceived “sustainable development” as the result of political democracy and a welfare state, the correlation of the development of institutions of political participation and social support for the population with stable economic growth. Moreover the dissolution of consensus around the goals of development and the very image of the future is largely due to the crisis of the institutions of the welfare state, with the exhaustion of the possibilities of Western societies to ensure their former standard of living at the expense of the resources of the rest of the world. There was a demand for a radical revision of the models and priorities of social policy that had developed in the industrial era; however, serious differences appeared in the approaches of the political and administrative elites and various social groups in Western countries.

Attempts to bring the academic discourse on the welfare state to a new level are largely associated with the difficulties of generating novel, breakthrough ideas in this area in recent years. No coincidence that the starting point in modern discussions is the study by the Danish sociologist Gösta Esping-Andersen, which was published during a period of active search for new models of development [Esping-Andersen, 1990].

This work, seminal for social research, dealt with the prospects of “welfare capitalism” as a basis for renewal the social contract that had developed in the postwar era in Western countries.

The Keynesian origins of the models identified by Esping-Andersen have become the property of economic history; in the context of a shrinking resource base for mass social support, current searches are directed towards a redistribution of responsibility between the state that sets development priorities; business as a “generator” of income; and citizens, families, and households as beneficiaries of state policy. At the center of the discussion are issues of responsibility and trust. The distribution of the obligations of the parties and the understanding of their mutual responsibility determine the direction of the development policy, but the ethical guidelines of such a policy remain vague, and the interpretation of the social norm and forms of its political institutionalization is a subject of acute disagreement in the expert community [Semenenko, 2019; 2021].

In the 2010s reformatting proceeded by revising the priorities of state regulation and increasing the responsibility of citizens for ensuring their wellbeing. The end of the “welfare state” was announced back in 2013 in the Netherlands: in this wealthy country in terms of GDP per capita (sixth place among European countries, \$54300 at PPP, data for 2020),<sup>3</sup> the “welfare society” model gave way to the “participation society.” This concept was adopted (openly or behind the scenes) in countries that based their social policy on the principles of state redistribution and social protection of the mass strata and developed the ideas and logic of the notorious “third way.” Experiments such

<sup>3</sup> GDP per capita, PPP—Country rankings, Global Economy.com, Business and economic data for 200 countries. [https://theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/gdp\\_per\\_capita\\_ppp/Europe/](https://theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/gdp_per_capita_ppp/Europe/).

as the introduction of an universal basic income—a mechanism for “transition to a more responsible personal strategy for each citizen” based on the “monetization” of the resources of the welfare state—have not been successful [Sadovaya, 2020, p. 70]. In the context of the emergence of new threats to human wellbeing associated with the pandemic, the degree of discussion about the limits of mutual obligations of participants in social interactions—the state, business, family, individual—and their consequences for ensuring guarantees of individual freedoms of a person and citizen has noticeably increased.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there was a radical shift in the agenda of discussions from a focus on social problems to a predominant focus on climate change and environmental degradation. At the same time, the demand to ensure an environmental and social “link” and to integrate the environmental component into the social dimension of development policy sounded ever more loudly. If we briefly outline the framework of the current discussion, then the question is about the fundamental possibility and about the ways of social development without harming the environment and ecological development without harming future generations. Such synergy is expected to be achieved by changing the direction of the dominant economic model towards postgrowth.

#### FROM “WELFARE STATE” TO “WELLBEING ECONOMY”

The radical transformations of the economic structure that occurred within the life cycle of one generation raised the question of reformatting the social policy agenda. The digital transformation of the state and the drift of the labor market towards an “invisible digital platform” is accompanied by changes in the regulation of employment, healthcare, education, and social security of the population that change the social policy agenda [Social State, 2020]. Do contemporary discourses reveal new outlines in the social development governance system? What influence does expert discourse have on the governance agenda? Or, on the contrary, do the impulses come from the state and from the market, from the players of the market economy and then are captured by the expert community?

The first publications on wellbeing as a development priority appeared in the early 1950s (the Scopus database, launched in 2004, registers only six such publications in 1951, and 17 ten years later). Since the late 1970s, a gradual growth begins, partly due to the reaction of the scientific and expert community to the 1972 report of the Club of Rome *The Limits to Growth*. In the 2000s the increment is already proceeding at a rapid pace, and at the turn of the third decade, it has passed the 25000 mark (26429 publications in 2021). The focus of researchers is theoretical understanding, qualitative assessments, and quantitative analysis of economic wellbeing, social wellbeing, and governance

practices for promoting and maintaining wellbeing. The focus on the achievements of the West as a model for the rest of the world in the last two decades is complemented by the promotion of positive experience and best practices of the non-Western world, but they are evaluated in the same Western-centric paradigm.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, a growing critical discourse focuses on reassessing the Western experience as universal, asking questions about the applicability of models of wellbeing and proposed mechanisms for their implementation, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<sup>5</sup> about “environmental imperialism” and “climate dictate” [Mazzocchi, 2020; Nefedov, 2005; Mohammed, 1999]. Even the current experience of European countries makes us pay attention to different priorities related to the peculiarities of political culture, national self-consciousness, and identity, as well as to the structure of the national economy and the ideological positions of political leaders (for example, in such different national-state communities as Hungary or Ireland).

The term *wellbeing* itself has a long history in philosophical and economic thought, but its roots in the social sciences date back to the second half of the 20th century. Wellbeing has become a reference point in the development and implementation of governance practices that correspond to the agenda of the welfare state of the universal Western model. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term *wellbeing* as “the state of being or doing well in life; a happy, healthy, or prosperous state; moral or physical wellbeing (of a person or community)”; Ozhegov’s explanatory dictionary, as “a calm and happy state” or “life in contentment.” The meanings that are invested today in the understanding of “wellbeing” as a scientific category are largely determined by the historical and cultural context of the study or the priorities of public policy.

Thus, in China, the official discourse states the construction of a “moderately prosperous society”; as guidelines for the future, the tasks of “achieving more noticeable and significant shifts in the comprehensive development of the individual and in the implementation of the general prosperity of the population”<sup>6</sup> are set. The slogan of “common prosperity” appeared in official political discourse under Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s, at the same time the question was raised of how to “avoid polarization” between rich and poor

<sup>4</sup> Costa Rica tops the Happy Planet Index, beating Western economies on sustainable wellbeing, The 2021 Happy Planet Index. <https://happyplanetindex.org/the-latest-happy-planet-index-costa-rica-tops-the-list-beating-western-economies-on-sustainable-wellbeing/>.

<sup>5</sup> Sipiczki, A. (2022) A critical look at the ESG market. <https://www.sipotra.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/A-CRITICAL-LOOK-AT-THE-ESG-MARKET.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Xi Jinping’s speech at the solemn meeting on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP, Xinhua News. [https://russian.news.cn/2021-07/01/c\\_1310038413.htm](https://russian.news.cn/2021-07/01/c_1310038413.htm).

areas of the country, “without weakening the vitality of developed areas and encouraging eating from the same big pot” [Deng Xiaoping, 1994, pp. 470–471]. Four decades later, “an ideal goal, the implementation of which was postponed until a high level of economic development was achieved,” “gained concrete shape” [Gamza and Lomanov, 2021, p. 150].

Obviously, this challenge is facing not only China. The correlation between the goals of the wellbeing economy and motivation for development actualizes the question of assessing the psychological dimension of development and of determining specific guidelines and horizons. Whether a “welfare society” is feasible in principle is debatable. This topic is discussed mainly in relation to population health and assessments of subjective wellbeing [Maccagnan et al., 2019]. A broader social vision is rather an exception; it is present in the documents of individual expert entities working in the field of social design; at the same time, the system of coordinates and the strategic vision of development are aligned in accordance with the standards and priorities of the developed countries of the West [see, for example, Hellström et al., 2015], which set the tone of the discussion. In recent years, the problems of the poorest countries have been acutely heard in the academic field in the context of postcolonial discourse.

In addition to ambiguous interpretations with an emphasis on economic indicators or subjective perception, both domestic and foreign researchers have difficulties in divorcing the concepts of “wellbeing” and “welfare.” The terms *wellbeing* and *welfare* are often used interchangeably, but in a strict sense they have different meanings. If welfare reflects the material side of the issue, wellbeing precisely characterizes the state of happiness and tranquility [Tsapenko, 2015, p. 23], that is, the feelings of a person experiencing these states, which are extrapolated to the community as the bearer of the “cumulative” feelings of its members. The category of subjective wellbeing reflects the state of social wellbeing of the individual and the community; today, as Russian researchers note, “the understanding that the subjective wellbeing of citizens is one of the most important tasks facing governments has become mainstream” [Monusova and Goffe, 2020, p. 166]; accordingly, the number of works studying not only psychological but also economic and political aspects of its influence on social development is growing. However, the methodology of “defining and measuring subjective wellbeing has not been worked out, which makes it difficult to study it and forces one to treat subjective assessments with restraint and caution” [Ibid., p. 178]. Such attempts have been made repeatedly; as a result, a common place has become a correlation with the ratings of the World Happiness Report, which has been released annually since 2012 under the auspices of the UN and is widely

promoted,<sup>7</sup> despite the controversial assessment criteria and the very possibility of a comparative assessment of the social dynamics of states according to such criteria.

The possibilities of political manipulation of subjective assessments in an attempt to evoke predictable reactions and to play on negative sentiments are used both in the struggle for votes and in the imposition of governing decisions. This rejection is reinforced by the experience of global risks and the gaps between the technological capabilities to generate them and the cognitive and sociopsychological resources of risk management; under these conditions, “there is a search for new role models of success and ‘narratives of hope’ based not on economic prosperity but on prosocial behavior” [Nestik and Zhuravleva, 2020, pp. 29, 22].

For the carriers of the religious picture of the world, such behavior is correlated with the Divine plan for man and the world, with the search for higher meanings of Being. Questions of compatibility of different pictures of the world are reflected in modern discussions about social justice, correlating, including critically, with the landmark work of John Rawls [Rawls, 1971], about the very possibility of “global justice” [see Sadovaya and Sautkina, 2015, pp. 52–59] and about social imagination as a source of forming a positive image of the future but also in discussions about the meanings and conflicting interpretations of development that this category is endowed with by carriers of different worldviews.

Understanding “the fundamental diversity of forms of people’s inner experience, the diversity of both cultural traditions and innovative searches” postulates the multidimensionality of development, which is supported by human relationships and the culture of dialogue [Rashkovskii, 2022, pp. 108–109]. The variety of forms of social wellbeing, which determines the horizons of social development, is the result of this primary multidimensionality of interpersonal and intergroup interactions and their institutional forms. However, such questions are outside the field of the mainstream discourse of “sustainable development,” which postulates the wellbeing guidelines as an entity given from the outside, as a task solved for a person, which is already saturated and oversaturated with economic and social meanings and does not accommodate different interpretations of such meanings. Beyond this discourse remains the spiritual dimension of development, as well as the vital, existential importance of finding ways to overcome the profound spiritual crisis of the consumer society. By ignoring this component in public discourse deepens the value divide in modern societies.

In the expert community today, there is basically a consensus around the key priorities of the transition

<sup>7</sup> *World Happiness Report*, New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.



to “wellbeing in life.” Among them, the climate and environmental agendas and the problems of inequality and social exclusion are invariably present. Furthermore, the demystification of economic growth as a universal response to societal demands, and the orientation of economic management decisions towards improving the level of intangible wellbeing of current and future generations is also sharply raised [Laurent, 2021].

#### LEARNING FROM EXPERT PLATFORMS: ALLIANCE FOR THE WELLBEING ECONOMY

The responsibility for promoting attractive models of the “wellbeing economy” as the basis of a new social consensus, undermined by the erosion of the foundations of the welfare state, is now shared by the expert communities and political elites of the countries promoting these priorities. Without exception, all interactions of this kind, aimed at attracting broad public attention, are carried out on open network platforms; the effectiveness of such interactions largely depends on expert support. Thus, corporate business has been popularizing its social responsibility within the framework of the “corporate citizenship” and “stakeholder capitalism” models for more than a decade, and its counterparties operate on numerous platforms of civil initiatives of the “global civil society” [see Peregudov and Semenenko, 2009]. However, these concepts themselves are losing their former attractiveness in the conditions of the crisis of the Western-centric model of globalization. Various expert ratings that assess the state and even the “degree” of public relations have become popular tools for organizing discussion and information [Sadovaya et al., 2016].

Efforts can be undertaken to harmonise the priorities and interests of different stakeholders around the socioeconomic regulatory agenda. For example, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll)<sup>8</sup> is a network of more than 200 civil-society and business organizations focused on advancing this agenda and citizens in their personal capacity. On this platform, a Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo) has been created, where wellbeing is not only included in the political and governance agenda and in national development strategies, but where targets to measure the wellbeing of national and local communities (Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo)) are being implemented. New Zealand, Scotland, Wales, Iceland, and Finland currently participate in this association. In fact, this initiative is designed to help deepen cooperation, search for innovative governance approaches and solutions, promote “good practices,” and exchange experience and information between members.

The organizers are aimed at expanding the partnership through states and regional governments with dif-

<sup>8</sup> Wellbeing Economy Alliance. <https://weall.org/>.

ferent economic indicators and different social structures, while this is a relatively homogeneous association of small northern and Anglo-Saxon countries. Each of the member countries positions itself as a leader in one of the key areas for promoting an alternative socioeconomic agenda.

#### *New Zealand*

Criticism of the paradigm of economic growth and GDP dynamics as an indicator that does not reflect the real level of wellbeing of the national community was voiced in academic discourse at the turn of the 1990s, when the New Zealand economist Marilyn Waring published a book that laid the foundation for “feminist economics.” This work drew attention to the contribution to the wellbeing of women in the household, which is not taken into account in the GDP, as well as the environmental damage from human economic activity [Waring, 1988].

In the three decades that have passed since then, the debate over adequate estimates of the level of wellbeing has only gained momentum. The result was the promotion of the international system for calculating the Human Development Index, then the Human Development Index under the UN auspices. Today, under the auspices of the World Economic Forum, broadcast projects for the integration of the “care economy” are being promoted, included as a way to solve problems of gender equality, especially by the example of the experience of non-Western countries, promoted in this context.<sup>9</sup> However, traditional GDP indicators remain superior.

Back in the early 1990s, the country’s minister of social security introduced the From Welfare to Wellbeing initiative, the goal of which was to mobilize society around a long-term social agenda [Player, 1994]. The initiative then focused only on social security and did not affect other areas. Today, New Zealand is one of the few leading countries in promoting the wellbeing economy model. For the fourth year in a row, it has approved a “wellbeing budget” that prioritizes people and the environment. Investment decisions are made considering the social and environmental performance of the projects. However, these decisions do not yet significantly affect the real situation in the social sphere and in the environment: biodiversity is deteriorating, and the impact of the pandemic is also felt. According to critics, the “wellbeing budget” does not change the logic of the functioning of the economic system but patches up the holes that this system

<sup>9</sup> Care economy: An opportunity to create jobs and close the gender gap, World Economic Forum 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/care-economy-gender-gapdavos22/#:~:text=The%20care%20economy%20comprehends%20those,even%20less%20are%20considered%20productive.>

leaves.<sup>10</sup> However, the critics themselves do not have a program for implementation of the intended targets.

New Zealand has a record of advancing the climate agenda to achieve carbon neutrality, also controversial in terms of achievable results but with strong political and public support. There is also the experience of integrating the priorities of the indigenous population into national development strategies: the policy of biculturalism ensured the promotion of Maori culture as a bearer of a unique image of the country, the “New Zealand project” was actively promoted as an advanced social model [Semenenko, 2021, pp. 35–37]. “Cultural identity” is included among the key dimensions of the wellbeing of New Zealand society, along with citizen involvement and trust in government institutions, the state of the environment, public health and housing, income and consumption, work and earnings, knowledge and skills, security, social connections, subjective wellbeing, and the distribution of time between work and leisure.<sup>11</sup> However, social inequality remains a serious problem, and the compatibility of economic, social, and environmental agendas is a systemic challenge both for the current “government of change” and for promoting the priorities of the “wellbeing economy.”

### Scotland

It was Scotland that in 2018 took the initiative to create the WEGo partnership on the foundation of the WEAll network platform. Like New Zealand, Scotland seeks to lead the way in promoting new development models and seeks to position itself in this debate and in promoting model “good practices.” Even before the official ratification of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon stated that Scotland would adopt the SDGs and provide international leadership in the implementation of this agenda [Pautz and Collins, 2019, p. 6].

Scotland is actively implementing targeted measures to promote the concept of the wellbeing economy and related governance approaches. Mechanisms have been launched that can contribute to the successful implementation of the outlined agenda, such as the payment of wages that ensure a decent quality of life (Living Wage Scotland); encouragement of socially oriented enterprises through the National Agency for Economic Development (Scottish Enterprise) through the provision of targeted grants; the adoption of advanced legislation on climate change that aims to achieve zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. A Just

Transition Commission has been set up to advise the government on how to support communities in the face of phasing out industries that are incompatible with a low-carbon economy. Achieving zero emissions is one of the priorities of the national entity of the same name (Zero Waste Scotland);<sup>12</sup> it promotes circular economy projects combined with responsible consumption education.

In December 2021, the Scottish Government presented a budget developed in collaboration with the Scottish Green Party, which prioritizes improving the welfare of citizens and the development of the social sphere, as well as achieving environmental sustainability; a separate section is devoted to the impact of planned spending on carbon emissions.<sup>13</sup> Among the tools that could help advance the wellbeing economy are the Community Empowerment Act and efforts to improve their welfare. In Scotland, the discourse of wellbeing is actively promoted at the local level.

However, the debate over the sources and priorities for the implementation of these ambitious plans only intensifies in the current conditions, and supporters of the welfare economy concept criticize current cabinet advisers who promote the principles of “green growth” within the traditional market economy paradigm.<sup>14</sup> The postpandemic recovery, the budget deficit, the situation around Ukraine, and the consequences of the EU sanctions policy make the implementation of the “wellbeing budget” in the planned volume an unrealistic prospect. An acutely negative reaction from the heads of the financial departments of Scotland and Wales was caused by the decision of the Cabinet of Boris Johnson to allocate another tranche of funds for military supplies to Ukraine in June 2022, partly at the expense of their social budgets;<sup>15</sup> in accordance with the principles of devolution, the management of these funds is the responsibility of the countries of the United Kingdom, while military items of expenditure are financed from the national budget.

### Wales

Wales joined the Alliance in 2020, but the wellbeing economy has been at the center of public discussion here for years. The idea was reflected in strategic documents, including urban development strategies [Zeidler et al., 2021]. In 2015, Wales passed the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (later incorporated into the Welsh Constitution) to achieve seven goals:

<sup>10</sup>Budgets must do more than patch failures, Newsroom, May 21 (2022). <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/budgets-must-do-more-than-patch-up-failures>.

<sup>11</sup>Our People. Our Country. Our Future. *Living Standards Framework: Background and Future Work*. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Government, The Treasury, 2018. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-12/lstf-background-future-work.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup>Zero Waste Scotland. <https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/>

<sup>13</sup>Scottish Budget 2022 to 2023, The Scottish Government, 2021. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-budget-2022-23/>.

<sup>14</sup>The Myth of Green Growth, Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2020. <https://weall.org/the-myth-of-green-growth>.

<sup>15</sup>Westminster raids Welsh Government funds to pay for military aid for Ukraine, Wales Online, June 30 (2022). <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/westminster-raids-welsh-government-funds-24361829>.

prosperity, sustainability, equality, health, community cohesion, cultural preservation and flourishing, and global responsibility. The priorities were formulated in the process of discussion between the state and stakeholders on the platform *The Wales We Want National Conversation*<sup>16</sup> [Parker, 2022, p. 212]. In addition to the three pillars—the economy, social sphere, and environment—the preservation of centuries of Welsh history and culture has been incorporated into the policy documents as a key pillar of this course. A set of 46 national indicators was proposed to measure progress towards the goals set. Expert entities, such as the Wales Center for Public Policy, are working on the development of evaluation criteria.

Despite the ambitious claims, experts admit that actions at the local level without reorganization of the governance system and strategic planning are of limited effectiveness [Ibid., p. 216]. Wales needs to modernize its port infrastructure and energy network, but the compatibility of such “traditional” priorities and a new vision of development is not obvious, especially since it is impossible to assess the long-term effects of the proposed measures within the existing development budgeting logic.<sup>17</sup>

### *Iceland*

The starting point for shaping the wellbeing policy agenda in Iceland was the financial crisis of 2008, which stimulated a revision of the priorities and model of economic management [Abrar, 2021, pp. 170, 171]. Among the priorities of this country, gender discourse and environmental sustainability are highlighted. In terms of gender equality, Iceland is a leader in world rankings. Correlation with the natural environment is a key landmark of the national identity of the Icelanders; any threat to the country’s ecosystems is painfully perceived by the inhabitants as a threat to themselves. The current head of the Cabinet of Ministers, Katrin Jakobsdóttir, notes that the social, economic, and environmental components of politics are inseparable, and the economy must be directed towards combating climate change and inequality.<sup>18</sup> Recent years have witnessed an increase in public trust in the authorities, which ensures the promotion of welfare priorities.

Based on consultations with stakeholders and taking into account public opinion polls, areas such as health, safe housing, work–life balance, achieving

carbon neutrality, innovative growth, and development of social connections were identified as priorities for the five-year financial plan [Abrar, 2021, p. 172]. A system of 39 indicators has been developed to evaluate the effectiveness.<sup>19</sup> Eight think tanks are responsible for expert assessments [Óskarsdóttir, 2020], primarily the National Statistical Center, the responsibilities of which include collecting, monitoring, analyzing, and data distribution on indicators of the wellbeing of the population on an ongoing basis, as well as tracking and developing these indicators in cooperation with key actors. The projects being implemented today are mainly represented by investments in social infrastructure, healthcare, and education and are included in an ambitious plan to achieve carbon neutrality no later than 2040.

At the turn of the 2010s, the University of Iceland in Reykjavik made an interesting attempt to compare the level of wellbeing of 29 countries in terms of social and economic indicators (in addition to the EU countries, the United States and Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey were included in the pool) in correlation with their level of wellbeing (i.e., in a combination of objective and subjective indicators). Iceland was sixth on this list.<sup>20</sup>

As the developer of this tool noted, the bureaucracy is very small in this country, and government structures often turn to independent experts. Although a significant part of the expertise is transferred to law firms and foreign agencies, some tasks are solved by the national scientific community, due to the small scale of the field, scholars can contribute to the solution of practical problems, which, in turn, directs the country’s scientific community to empirical research of a pragmatic nature [Ólafsson, 2011, p. 17]. As a result of the combined efforts of state and expert structures, a small country with a population of about 350 000 people has developed ambitious social and environmental programs. Bearing in mind the scale and insular geographic location, their feasibility is largely determined by natural factors (in particular, climate shifts), while demographic problems and trends in rapid population aging and declining birth rates also act as serious objective constraints.

### *Finland*

The experience of Finland is of particular interest, since the Nordic countries are examples of “successful implementation of the welfare state model” [Zhuravleva, 2019, p. 115] in its classical sense. Over the past three years, this country has been consistently ranked first in the well-known “rating of happiness” (Iceland

<sup>16</sup>The Wales We Want National Conversation. <https://cynnal-cymru.com/the-wales-we-want-national-conversation/?cn-reloaded=1>.

<sup>17</sup>The impact of infrastructure on wellbeing in Wales, Wales Center for Public Policy, May 23 (2022). <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/commentary/the-impact-of-infrastructure-on-well-being-in-wales/>.

<sup>18</sup>Iceland and the Wellbeing Economy, Chatham House, 2019. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_yY\\_iW0iYw&ab\\_channel=ChathamHouse](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_yY_iW0iYw&ab_channel=ChathamHouse).

<sup>19</sup>Indicators for measuring wellbeing (2019) Government of Iceland, Prime Minister’s Office. <https://www.government.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=fc981010-da09-11e9-944d-005056bc4d74>.

<sup>20</sup>Comparing wellbeing of nations: An international database, Þjóðmálastofnun, Social Research Center, University of Iceland, 2011. <http://wellbeing.hi.is/29nations.php>.

is in third position),<sup>21</sup> although the significance and reliability of such assessments, as was noted above, is beyond dispute.

Finland was the last to join the Wellbeing Economics Partnership. The main challenge for the country's social policy is the aging of the population [Lång, 2022]. Experts predict serious increases in the burden on healthcare under the influence of climate change.<sup>22</sup> To address these challenges, Finland has also adopted a welfare economy model. Significant efforts to promote the concept itself were made during the Finnish Presidency of the EU Council in 2019. At the same time, emphasis was placed on the social component—the importance of education, social security, healthcare, achieving gender equality, and safe and healthy working conditions. The willingness to promote such a model was enshrined in the program “Inclusive and Competent Finland: A Socially, Economically, and Environmentally Sustainable Society.”<sup>23</sup> These initiatives were institutionally reinforced by the establishment of a working group on welfare economics within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to develop a national strategy based on Finnish realities; under the auspices of the Finnish Parliament, the think tank SITRA operates as an intellectual leader in the development of such a strategy and initiator of pilot projects at the local level [Hellström et al., 2015].

Drivers of development in the conditions of the highest level of regulation of the social sphere and forced equalization of incomes need innovative forms of support. A feature of Finland is the attention to delegating decisions to the local level and the development of interaction between local authorities and communities. The introduction of new governance practices is also carried out at the level of Finnish municipalities.<sup>24</sup> Unlike other countries of the WEGO Partnership, Finland does not have a system of indicators for measuring wellbeing, and benchmarks, such as reducing inequality and income gaps, as well as achieving carbon neutrality by 2035, are included in related public policy areas.

The platform of the Alliance for the Wellbeing Economy supports network communications, popularizes “good practices,” and offers practical solutions to promote the wellbeing economy model. Many

<sup>21</sup> *World Happiness Report*, New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Healthcare and social welfare must systematically prepare for climate change, Finnish government, 2021. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1271139/healthcare-and-social-welfare-must-systematically-prepare-for-climate-change>.

<sup>23</sup> Inclusive and Competent Finland: A Socially, Economically, and Environmentally Sustainable Society, Program of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government, Helsinki: Publications of the Finnish Government, 2019. [https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/International\\_Ed\\_Study\\_Group\\_2020/Finland/10.Finland2019GovernmentPriorities%20.pdf](https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/educ/International_Ed_Study_Group_2020/Finland/10.Finland2019GovernmentPriorities%20.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Doughnut economics toolbox launch for Finnish municipalities, Doughnut Economics Action Lab, 2022. <https://doughnuteconomics.org/events/179>.

OECD countries rely on similar approaches to one degree or another; in several states (for example, in the Netherlands), the discourse of the wellbeing economy is integrated into the broader social context of the “participatory society.” At the same time, it is unlikely that in the foreseeable future this discourse will become mainstream even in the context of the notorious sustainable development, despite attempts to spread it beyond the group of rich countries that initiated the development of goal-oriented national strategies. This does not exclude the possibility of using “good practices,” but it also requires adequate responses to new challenges facing the social development governance system in a radically changed international political and information technology environment. The question is to what extent it is fundamentally possible to give such answers within the framework of the promoted paradigm of the “wellbeing economy” and the transition to a “wellbeing society.” Moreover, the motivation for development is not limited to these guidelines.

#### ECOPOLITICAL DISCOURSES AND SOCIAL PRIORITIES: PROBLEMS OF COMPATIBILITY

Environmental degradation and the forecasts of environmental disasters that have not yet occurred, presented in the report of the Club of Rome, mass movements of the 1960s–1970s, and fierce competition between the strategies of corporate players around the “green transition” agenda stimulated a discussion about the need to include environmental policy in the economic development strategies of countries and integration associations. In 2019, the EU Green Deal, commonly known as the European Green Deal, was adopted. The very posing of the question of a “deal” reflects the ambiguity of the priorities of this initiative, its most powerful business component, but also the search for new parameters of a social contract for development around the “green agenda” [Khaynatskaya, 2021]. On the relationship between ecology and development, which was previously considered only in the economic and social key, today the political programs of parties and governments and the targets of international organizations working in various areas of public activity are built—from education and health, culture and tourism to the fight against hunger and aid to refugees.

The discourse on the relationship between environment and wellbeing was reflected in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment series of reports prepared under the auspices of the UN in 2001–2005. The initiative aimed to assess “the consequences of ecosystem change for human wellbeing and to establish the scientific basis for actions needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems and their con-

tributions to human wellbeing.”<sup>25</sup> Both issues have been included in the SDGs and ESG assessments, and their combination is seen as a new evolutionary step in updating the environmental and social policy toolkit [Wallimann, 2013]. Today, organizations such as the OECD see wellbeing as a systemic basis for addressing climate challenges.<sup>26</sup>

The inclusion of environmental and climate issues into the global policy agenda has entailed the integration of the environmental dimension into the wellbeing economy model. However, beyond the framework of general declarations of intent, there are compatibility issues, the social price that will have to be paid for the implementation of environmental priorities, and the reverse damage to the environment from social obligations. The risks for the welfare state have been talked about for a long time [Eichner and Wagener, 2004]. Its functioning depends on economic growth, which is considered one of the main factors affecting climate change and environmental degradation [Büchs and Koch, 2017]. Since environmental policy is built around measures, regulations, and a system of regulators that require large-scale investments, the poorer segments of the population suffer due to dependence on state support and lower adaptive capacity [Gough and Meadowcroft, 2012]. Social policies themselves can be carbon intensive as a result of stimulating potentially unsustainable consumption driven by rising disposable income and satisfying needs for subjective wellbeing [Gough, 2017]. The political class of the developed world promotes on international expert platforms an ideal picture of combining social and environmental policies as part of a single strategy for the transition to sustainable development and wellbeing, while its limitations and contradictions are practically not discussed in public political discourse [Koch and Fritz, 2014]. Given the limited capacity of the state budget, social and environmental initiatives initially “compete” for funding and resources [Dryzek, 2008]. The new challenges are the pandemic and growing international tensions, behind which the threat of famine looms in the poorest countries. Migration flows due to environmental changes can become a burden on social financing, the volume of which is difficult to predict.

Possible ways of synergy of the social and environmental agenda, as its supporters argue, are the transformation of the welfare state into an ecological one (ecostate) or into a symbiotic eco-welfare state [García-García et al., 2022]. In societies with a low

level of social inequality and a high level of decommodification (social security outside the market), the presence of social benefits and “airbags,” which in one way or another protect against market shocks, can lay the foundations of an ecostate. Its condition is environmental modernization [Koch and Fritz, 2014], which includes the transition to a more efficient use of resource potential and energy and to “clean” technologies, which reduces the burden on the environment. The application of the Kuznets curve to the analysis of the possibilities of environmental development shows that, as the incomes of states increase, the state of the environment improves, because more expensive and cleaner technologies with less damage to nature can be introduced [Panayotou, 1997], but the cost of such technologies is not correlated with the economic return and social effects of their use. Public support in a strategic perspective can be provided by a transition to postmaterial values influenced by shifts in the cultural norm, but the assimilation of such attitudes does not necessarily imply a commitment to an eco-lifestyle and income redistribution. Ronald Inglehart wrote about the challenges of postmaterialism in conditions of economic instability in the early 1980s, reflecting on the impact of the energy crisis and recession of the previous decade [Inglehart, 1981]. Environmental priorities and the pursuit of social justice may have different motives [Jakobsson et al., 2018]: for example, modern environmental policy is criticized as an attempt by the welfare state to “preserve a lifestyle with high consumption” at the expense of the rest of the world [Bailey, 2015]. Climate policy is perceived ambiguously by socially vulnerable groups of the population and becomes the basis for the emergence of econationalism [Margulies, 2021].

Great expectations in the context of the concept of postgrowth are pinned on the figurative idea of the doughnut economy. It is also based on the sustainable development goals and, in fact, is a concept of transition to a welfare society balancing between social and environmental indicators. Proponents of this approach are looking for opportunities to correlate human needs and the damage from their satisfaction to the environment: on the one hand, no one should live without meeting the minimum social and material needs (“in a doughnut hole”); on the other hand, the condition for their satisfaction is life in ecological boundaries to conserve the natural environment (without breaking the doughnut ring) [Raworth, 2017].

The metaphor is widely discussed in the expert community, which does not share the ideas of globalism, but it has obvious utopian messages<sup>27</sup> and serious ideological contradictions that have become the object

<sup>25</sup>Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis*, Washington, DC: Island Press. <https://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.356.aspx.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup>Climate Change Mitigation through a Well-being Lens “Putting people at the center of climate action,” OECD (2019). <https://www.oecd.org/environment/cc/flyer-climate-change-mitigation-through-a-well-being-lens.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup>Milanovic, B. (2018) Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist by Kate Raworth, *Brave New Europe*. <https://braveneweuropa.com/doughnut-economics-seven-ways-to-think-like-a-21st-century-economist-by-kate-raworth>.

of massive criticism. Personal sacrifice for the sake of the common good and a voluntary refusal to increase needs, motivated by a high level of environmental awareness, are far from always acceptable economically or psychologically achievable. In the broader context of the wellbeing economy, attempts to account for diverse indicators based on universal criteria are fraught with the danger of reformatting responsibilities, shifting it from the state to the citizen, as in the case of an universal basic income, and implicit support for neoliberal principles of regulation. The desire to develop universal approaches to achieving a balance between development goals within the framework of the modern world order leads to a systemic contradiction: in less developed countries, it is necessary to ensure economic growth to fight poverty, but growth contributes to environmental degradation, while the alarmist “green” discourse persistently and even aggressively promotes the idea that humanity does not have the time or resources to maintain viability within the growth paradigm.

#### CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A NEW SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

The study of discourses that promote the model of the wellbeing economy and the society built on the foundation of such a model testifies to the search for new development opportunities beyond the traditional welfare state but also to systemic contradictions in attempts to develop universal development benchmarks. The possibilities of linking the environmental and social agendas are not obvious, especially considering the shifts in public consciousness and public policy priorities that have taken place under the influence of the pandemic, when the issue of the social and economic determinants of people’s health as a key dimension of wellbeing has become acute [Dalziel and Cameron, 2021].

Among the stakeholders involved in the discussions—scholars, experts, politicians, civic activists, representatives of urban and rural communities or interest groups speaking on behalf of “green” business sectors—there are many sincere supporters of post-growth ideas, who are convinced that it is possible to change the targets of economic development through changes in the cultural norm and the corresponding political and administrative agenda under the influence of the active position of citizens and responsible expert work [see Laurent, 2021]. They are optimistic about the possibilities of implementing alternative approaches to the economic growth paradigm, which, in their opinion, bring the prospects of a “wellbeing society” closer. However, the budgets adopted in post-growth-oriented countries reveal a continuing high dependence on progressive economic dynamics and GDP growth. Shift in political priorities towards “green” targets in the future could lead to the redirection of resources from social spending in favor of envi-

ronmental protection or adaptation to these changes. The taxation of nonenvironmental consumption can impose an additional financial burden on citizens. Changes are driven by a divergence between social priorities and ecological benchmarks, creating new cleavages (!) in societies where widespread political appeals to reduce inequality are not matched by measurable results for citizens. Thus, the forced recourse to traditional energy sources confronts the supporters of solving acute social problems and radical adherents of the “green” agenda.

The academic community, which is represented mainly by scholars from developed and relatively prosperous countries by the standards of social wellbeing, actively promotes “universal” benchmarks for social and environmental governance and related approaches that can minimize damage to their economies. However, the proposed priorities limit the ability of the rest of the world to achieve a comparable level and quality of life, thereby helping to maintain the existing division between the notorious “golden billion” and the rest of the population. It is obvious that the current increase in international tension and the unfolding struggle for development resources objectively make even more uncertain the prospects for, albeit selectively, partial implementation of these models even within the framework of national economies that are small in the world. Slowdown of “wellbeing budgets” after the pandemic are the first signs of difficulties; it is obvious that in the context of growing energy and resource poverty, they will also increase. For more complex political and administrative structures that have developed in large economies, it is even more impossible to implement such approaches.

The collapse of the existing world order and the reframing of economic ties, as well as the confrontation of the collective West with Russia and the rigid sanctions pressure on Russia, cause further intensification of systemic problems in the development of previously wealthy Western societies. Thus, energy starvation contributes to inflation, which gobbles “excessive” budgets—potential sources of reorientation of spending. Consequently, supporters of the wellbeing economy face a dilemma: to overcome the crisis by traditional methods, focusing on familiar sources of growth, or to reconstruct the governance system under a new “green” framework and struggle with the obvious economic costs of this choice and unpredictable societal consequences.

The narratives of the wellbeing economy will not go into oblivion, but the semantic content of the concept itself and the criteria for its evaluation will change. The absolutization of GDP indicators works against development, as does the desire to rely solely or primarily on measurements of subjective wellbeing. The ambitious plans of “model” national strategies will have to be adjusted at the very least. Finding a balance between the needs of economic growth and post-

growth priorities that can mitigate the negative effects of growth on the human environment, apparently, remains to be experienced.

The ongoing changes in the structure of the world order, the crisis of the Western-centric model of globalization, and the strengthening of regional centers of power are eroding the universalist socioeconomic agenda for sustainable development. International platforms of various formats that have developed in recent years have ceased to be generators of common benchmarks; the representativeness of various kinds of ratings and other tools for comparing development vectors of countries and regions is questionable. Under these conditions, a scientifically based assessment of the social development agenda based on a combination of measurable and nonmeasurable indicators of human wellbeing becomes a key research priority. The role of the expert community is growing not only and even not so much in the elaboration of development policy priorities but in revising the logic of building the corresponding discourse. Success here largely depends on the level of trust and the culture of dialogue in society, which allow negotiating the social price of the strategies proposed for implementation at the national level but also at the level of cities and territories, using both tangible and intangible resources, based on the promotion of principles of *responsible development*. We would like to hope for the emergence of new narratives that can reflect not only the vital needs of a person of the 21st century but also the meaningful life aspirations of a person living in this rapidly changing social reality.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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## An Inequilateral Triangle: Russia–United States–China in a New Geopolitical Environment

S. M. Rogov<sup>#</sup> (ORCID: 0000-0002-3957-7128)

*Institute for US and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences (ISKRAN), Moscow, Russia*

*e-mail: pa.to.rogov@gmail.com*

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**Abstract**—The author offers a general comparative overview of the relations of three key countries—Russia, China, and the United States. A new geopolitical picture of the world is presented with three centers of power. The triangle evolves, changing the potential of each of its sides. The three-party relationships are not equipollent. China is building up its economic, nuclear, and political potential, turning into a peer competitor of the United States on the world stage. Russia competes with the United States only in the military-strategic sphere. That is why US foreign policy today is aimed at “double containment” of both Russia and China. At the same time, Washington seeks to rely on its allies both in Europe, strengthening NATO, and in the Indo–Pacific region, pursuing a “latticework” strategy. This promises a long-term confrontation between the US angle and the Chinese and Russian angles of the triangle.

**Keywords:** triangle, foreign policy, “chimerica,” nuclear balance, priority challenge, military policy, strategy of “double deterrence,” national defense strategy, military-strategic balance, latticework, concept of “strategic autonomy”

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### INTRODUCTION

I would like to draw attention to several points regarding relations among Russia, China, and the United States. After the Second World War, this triangle has played a very important role in world politics and economics, as well as in the military sphere. Moreover, at present this role is not weakening, but increasing.

The US–China–Russia triangle largely determines the course of events in the world in the 21st century. It includes two economic superpowers; the three largest nuclear states; the 1st, 3rd, and 4th countries in terms of territory; and the 1st, 3rd, and 10th states in terms of population [1].

The sides of the triangle are not equal. China is significantly ahead of Russia in nonmilitary parameters, Washington leads in military spending, and Moscow ranks first in nuclear weapons.

### HISTORY OF THE TRIANGLE

During the First Cold War, relations in the triangle developed in a zigzag fashion. After the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with the help of the Soviet Union in the civil war, the United States refused

to recognize the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The alliance between Moscow and Beijing against Washington manifested itself in the Korean War, where the American army was opposed by millions of Chinese “people’s volunteers.” The Soviet Union played an important role as a “big brother” in the creation of the political and economic system in the PRC.

However, by the early 1960s, relations between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the CCP had deteriorated sharply due to Mao’s unwillingness to support the “fight against the cult of personality” and due to N.S. Khrushchev’s refusal to provide the Chinese with nuclear weapons. The PRC independently created its own nuclear weapons. During the so-called cultural revolution, armed clashes took place on the Soviet–Chinese border.

In 1972, President R. Nixon, realizing that Mao had staked on “the fight against Soviet hegemonism,” visited Beijing, and in 1979 the administration of President J. Carter agreed to official diplomatic recognition of the PRC, depriving the Kuomintang government in Taiwan of the status of the legitimate representative of China. Thus, the American and Chinese corners of the triangle created a structure that resisted the Soviet Union until the late 1980s.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the disappearance of the bipolar system of international relations. Washington staked on the consolidation of the

<sup>#</sup> RAS Academician Sergey Mikhailovich Rogov, Dr. Sci. (Hist.), is ISKRAN Academic Director and Chief Research Fellow.

unipolar world with the United States as the only superpower. The Soviet Union was no longer among those who could try to catch up, but there were two states that were defeated in World War II, which, under the protection of the American umbrella during the Cold War, turned into powerful economic powers that began to compete with the United States. However, Washington had powerful levers that controlled the military–political independence of Bonn and Tokyo—NATO<sup>1</sup> and a mutual security treaty.

As a result, the PRC gained broad access to American investments, technologies, and the higher education system. Labor productivity increased significantly. This became one of the main reasons for the extremely rapid pace of development of the Chinese economy over several decades. China came out first in high-tech exports. In the 21st century, it has become a “factory of the world,” employing 236 million people in China’s industry, while the United States employs 34 million, and Russia, 21 million.

China has become the main supplier of household goods to the giant American consumer market. Thus, the economic interdependence of the United States and China arose. At the same time, a gigantic trade deficit has been formed, as well as the American debt to China—more than \$1 trillion, which remains to this day.

In 2021, Russia accounted for 0.8% of foreign trade and 0.2% of US foreign investment, ranking 23rd among US trading partners [2] and importing mainly raw materials. Russian–Chinese trade and economic relations are more developed. In 2021, Russia accounted for 27% of Chinese coal imports, 16% of oil, and 8% of gas. At the same time, China accounted for 72% of Russian imports of computers and telecommunications equipment and 56% of semiconductors. China was Russia’s second foreign trade partner after the EU, 18%, while the share of the United States was only 4% [3].

At the beginning of this century, China took second place in the world in terms of GDP and began to approach the United States in many parameters of economic development. In the middle of the past decade, it overtook the United States in terms of GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP).

As a result, the United States lacked a “critical mass” to stop China from becoming a “peer-to-peer” competitor.

This allowed the PRC to use its economic power to begin a large-scale modernization of its armed forces, in no small part due to the purchase and copying of modern Russian weapons. At the same time, the Chinese have deployed many medium-range ballistic missiles in the eastern provinces. The United States with-

drew from the INF Treaty, motivating this step by the need to respond to the deployment of missiles of this class by the Chinese, forcing the American fleet to retreat behind the so-called first line of islands, and in the future, the second line of islands.

China seeks to establish a security zone in the coastal seas of the Pacific Ocean and has begun to create an ocean fleet to ensure maritime transit of Chinese export goods and imports of raw materials not only in the Pacific but also in the Indian Ocean. The number of Chinese surface ships and submarines in 2000–2020 increased from 110 to 360 units. This is formally more than that of the US Navy, but in terms of tonnage of warships, the Chinese are three times inferior to the Americans.

The administration of George W. Bush lost control of this situation, mired after September 11, 2001, in an endless war with “Islamofascism.” During this period, the concept of Chimerica appeared—an alliance of two powers under the leadership of the United States. A supporter of this concept was, for example, Zbigniew Brzezinski. However, Beijing rejected such a scenario and began to demonstrate the desire to protect its interests.

Recognizing the challenge from the Chinese giant, the Obama administration announced the transfer of the pivot of American military policy to the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, Washington tried to create a kind of “common market” for all the states of this region except for China. However, D. Trump unilaterally abandoned this idea and launched an open trade war against China. This has led to some decline in US investment in China and US imports of Chinese goods. Washington began to condemn sharply the Chinese policy in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Nevertheless, the PRC has overtaken the United States in terms of GDP at PPP, although it continues to lag behind in terms of GDP at the exchange rate.

After the outbreak of the pandemic, American propaganda claimed that the coronavirus was created by the CCP. Biden has generally continued the strategy of containment of the PRC.

As for Russian–Chinese relations, they normalized in the 1990s. Territorial disputes were settled (mainly due to concessions from the Russian Federation) and military tensions were defused in the border areas. Gradually, trade began to improve. Russia has become the main supplier of weapons to China, for many billions of dollars. Joint military exercises have begun to be held.

Perhaps the most important factor was the development of cooperation between Moscow and Beijing in their approach to international affairs, as opposed to Washington. This was clearly manifested in the introduction of a joint draft treaty banning the deployment of weapons in outer space, as well as the creation of multilateral forums such as the RIC, BRICS, and SCO. Although the alliance was not formally con-

<sup>1</sup> According to the classic formula of NATO’s first Secretary General Lord Ismay, NATO’s goal is “to keep America in [Europe], Germany down, and the Soviet Union out [of Europe].”

cluded, it was proclaimed that “cooperation between Russia and China has no boundaries, our struggle for peace has no boundaries, our desire to maintain security has no limits, our opposition to hegemonism has no limits” [4]. Thus, the term *hegemonism* has been revived, but it is applied not to Moscow but to Washington.

Consequently, the configuration of the triangle has changed again. China and Russia began to balance the United States again, hindering the desire of the Americans to consolidate the unipolar world order. At the same time, Washington will continue to implement the strategy of “double containment” between Moscow and Beijing for the foreseeable future. However, the United States does not seem to have the strength to tackle such a difficult task alone.

### PUBLIC OPINION

Opinion polls in all three countries support the thesis that we are living in a new Cold War (Cold War 2.0).

In recent years, a stable bipartisan anti-Russian and anti-Chinese consensus has developed within the US political elite. The rampant propaganda is unprecedented. Henry Kissinger assessed this as the “demonization” of Russia [5].

Propaganda is also reflected in the sentiments of the American public. The negative assessments of the Russian Federation and the PRC have returned to the 1950s and 1960s and even surpass the stereotypes of that period.

The positive image of Russia that was observed after the end of the first Cold War has disappeared almost without a trace. During the period of perestroika in the Soviet Union in 1989, for the first time, a positive assessment of our country was noted in American public opinion. The last time most respondents gave a positive assessment of our country was in 2011. Since then, negative ratings have steadily increased and, according to Gallup, in 2022 reached the highest level in the history of public opinion polls, 88% on the eve of the start of a special military operation in Ukraine [6]. A Pew Research Center survey showed that the proportion of Americans who consider Russia an “enemy” rose from 41 to 70% from January to March 2022 [7].

Traditionally, the Republican Party has taken a tougher stance against the Soviet Union. This trend continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, after the 2016 presidential election, the Democrats overtook the Republicans in their negative attitude towards the Russian Federation. After Trump came to power, the Republicans continued to somewhat lag behind the Democrats in this indicator. However, now the parties have equalized in support of anti-Russian views. It seems that this situation will continue for a long time.

A similar picture is observed in Russia. Here, too, during the years of perestroika, the negative attitude towards the United States began to change to a positive one. This continued, according to the Levada Center,<sup>2</sup> until the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia. Later, the war in South Ossetia and the first Maidan in Ukraine played a negative role. However, the situation finally changed in 2014. The new Cold War consolidated the negative image of the United States. In the spring of 2022, 75% of respondents believed that the United States is unfriendly to Russia.

As for China, the secret diplomacy of Kissinger paved the way for Nixon’s visit to Beijing in 1972 and then for the normalization of relations between the United States and China. After the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979, 66% of Americans viewed China favorably. The development of US–Chinese cooperation to contain the Soviet Union brought this figure to 72%. However, the events on Tiananmen Square led to a more than twofold reduction in positive attitudes towards China, 34%. Subsequently, positive estimates remained at the level of 40–45% for many years, until they dropped to 21% in 2021. Now the negative attitude towards China has reached 79%, which is even somewhat worse than towards Russia [6].

Ninety-two percent of Americans believe that the partnership between Russia and China is a “serious problem” for America, and 64%, that “China’s power and influence pose a serious threat” [8]. However, only 25% of those surveyed consider China an “enemy” (12% Democrats and 45% Republicans), and 62%, only a “rival.”

Thus, the rampant propaganda has led to the fact that stable negative stereotypes have developed in the public mind of the United States regarding Russia and China. The same thing also happened with respect to the United States in the mood of the Russian and Chinese public. Historical experience shows that it will take many years and even decades to revise these stereotypes, which will also be reflected in the approach of political circles.

### DOCTRINAL INNOVATIONS OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Already in the very first doctrinal document of the Biden administration, published in March 2021, the Chinese and Russian angles of the triangle were assessed: “Both Beijing and Moscow have invested heavily in efforts meant to check US strengths and prevent us from defending our interests and allies around the world.” However, important differences were recognized: “China, in particular, has rapidly become more assertive. It is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained

<sup>2</sup> Recognized as a foreign agent.

challenge to a stable and open international system.” In this regard, it is proclaimed [9, p. 20]:

We will ensure that America, not China, sets the international agenda, working alongside others to shape new global norms and agreements that advance our interests and reflect our values. By bolstering and defending our unparalleled network of allies and partners, and making smart defense investments, we will also deter Chinese aggression.

Russia is not recognized as such a rival, although it is stated that it “remains determined to enhance its global influence and play a disruptive role on the world stage” [9, p. 8].

In April 2022, the US Department of Defense published a doctrinal document, the National Defense Strategy. This is the short version, just two pages, and it is impossible not to read it carefully without concluding that the United States sees China as its number one adversary. Moreover, China is mentioned three times on these two pages and described as a priority challenge for the United States. Russia is mentioned twice and described as an acute threat [10]. Apparently, this is due to the events in Ukraine and the military operation that Russia is conducting there. However, it is clear that China is perceived as an adversary in the economic, political, ideological, and military spheres, whereas Russia is considered primarily a direct military threat to the United States, and the reason for this is the presence of an impressive nuclear arsenal in Moscow. However, in economic terms, Russia is not seen as a competitor to the United States.

The Biden administration has made no secret of its intention to defeat Russia in a special military operation in Ukraine. Washington has almost completely frozen diplomatic contacts with Moscow and hinders Russian–Ukrainian peace talks. The United States and its allies have provided Kyiv with financial and military assistance that exceeds the Ukrainian state budget. At the same time, the West unleashed a real economic war against our country, having worked out in advance some measures that had never been used before in peacetime.

The unprecedented economic sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies against Russia will lead, according to some experts, to a reduction in Russian GDP by 10% in 2022. The sanctions were described as an attempt to destroy the Russian economy, but this did not happen, although it led to serious socioeconomic consequences for Russia. It will take about ten years to bring our economy back to the 2021 level.

On March 26 of this year in Warsaw, Biden said that the Russian president, whom he called a “war criminal” after the start of the special military operation, “should not remain in power” and actually supported “regime change in Russia” [11]. Although the State Department later denied that this was a US goal.

Clearly what is happening is similar to Washington’s attempt to change the regime in Moscow.

The second aspect relates to the notion promoted by Graham Allison about the history of great power rivalry, and his conclusion was that a clash between China and the United States is almost inevitable (“Thucydides trap”) [12]. According to the concept of the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, during the rivalry between the great powers of Athens and Sparta, a military conflict was almost inevitable. This perception is shared by many American experts who are trying to figure out how to prevent such an outcome.

The next aspect relates to the idea that, if Russia can be successful and achieve its goals in Ukraine, this will encourage China to use military force to reunite with Taiwan. There is a fierce debate in the United States about how to protect Taiwan from the PRC by creating a strategy that will deny a Chinese victory. This approach is most aggressively promoted by Elbridge Colby [13]. Such a denial strategy includes several elements, providing Taiwan with sufficient military equipment, as well as building up US strategic and nonstrategic nuclear forces and missile defense. All this should deprive China of the ability to launch a preemptive strike against US aircraft carrier groups and military bases in the Western Pacific.

Finally, there is a dispute in the American expert community about how to destroy a potential Russian–Chinese alliance that would become a counterbalance to the United States. Some American experts suggest that the United States should carry out the Kissinger maneuver in reverse, that is, establish partnerships with Russia to contain China [14].

In reality, however, the Biden administration is pursuing a completely different policy: its actions against Russia are pushing the latter towards closer relations with China. Recently, there have been speculations that there is an opportunity to push China away from supporting Russia with the help of threats of imposing secondary economic sanctions against Chinese companies. Thus, if China continues to develop economic relations with Russia, then it will be punished by economic sanctions from the United States and its allies. However, the idea of the PRC breaking away from Russia is disputed by some experts because they point to the economic interdependence both between China and the United States and between China and Europe. They state that sanctions against China would be counterproductive.

Some American experts argue that the current concern about the Russian threat should not dampen attention to China as the main long-term priority of American policy in the 21st century. As a recent report from the Congressional Research Service highlights, “The key issues observers are currently debating include how much priority US defense planning should give to Europe (to deter or respond to Russian actions) versus the Indo–Pacific (to deter China),”

specifically defining “how the US response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine might influence Chinese calculations regarding potential actions it might take toward Taiwan.” These discussions may “lead to changes in the US grand strategy or defense strategy, and/or the size of the US defense budget” [15].

### NUCLEAR BALANCE

Comparison of the military–strategic balance shows that the Russian Federation remains a nuclear superpower and still maintains approximate parity with the United States. There are no official data, but, according to SIPRI, each side has 6000 nuclear warheads, which is 15–20 times more than China has [16]. Russia and the United States continue to comply with the START-3 Treaty, signed in 2012 and extended until 2026 [17]. As of March 1, this year, the United States had 1515 nuclear warheads deployed on 686 delivery vehicles (ICBMs, SLBMs, heavy bombers), and Russia had 1474 and 761, respectively [18].

At the same time, it is believed that Moscow significantly outnumbers Washington in nonstrategic nuclear warheads [19]. Experts from the Federation of American Scientists claim that the United States has only 200 such warheads [20], while Russia has about 2000 [21].

A new generation of US cruise, ballistic, and hypersonic missiles will likely begin to be deployed in 2023 not only against China but also near Russian borders in Europe, for example, in the Baltic and Poland. This will allow American missiles with a short flight time to hit many strategic targets on the territory of the Russian Federation.

In 2022, the United States broke off negotiations with Russia on strategic stability and the development of a new treaty to replace START-3. Considering that earlier Washington unilaterally withdrew from the ABM, INF, and open skies treaties, there is the prospect of a complete and irreversible collapse of the arms control regime that has been in place for several decades.

It should be noted that the American allies, who for many years declared their support for arms control, followed the lead of the United States and supported the rupture of the above agreements. There are no intelligible proposals from the Europeans.

At the same time, there is great concern in the United States, which relates to the buildup of Chinese nuclear forces and the construction of several hundred silo launchers (silos) for ICBMs, which, according to American experts, China is conducting. This will allow the PRC to acquire even more strategic nuclear weapons in the next few years, and in ten or 20 years to catch up and even surpass the United States and Russia in this indicator. Thus, the prospect of a trilateral strategic arms race in the second quarter of this century is emerging.

A possible rapid buildup of China’s nuclear potential is hardly in the interests of the Russian Federation. It is no coincidence that the extreme right circles of the United States are already calling for a withdrawal from START to immediately resume the buildup of the nuclear arsenal, to abandon parity with Russia, and prevent parity with China.

### NATO’S NEW STRATEGY: COALITION STRATEGY

The coalition strategy of the Biden administration was primarily aimed at overcoming the crisis in the North Atlantic Alliance, which was provoked by Trump’s rhetoric. To a certain extent, this was done, and Washington was able to restore its leadership in NATO. This gives the United States the opportunity to mobilize the resources of its European allies to contain Russia.

In the economic sphere, Europe is practically not inferior to the Americans: Europeans account for 15% of world GDP and 12% of industrial production, 24% of exports and 25% of R&D spending. Formally, these figures enable the European Union to claim the role of another superpower. However, the European Union does not have sovereignty for independent action contrary to the position of the “senior partner,” the United States. Therefore, the Biden administration was able to coordinate the economic sanctions of the West against the Russian Federation and the supply of weapons and the provision of financial assistance to Ukraine.

In addition, the European members of NATO have 57% of military personnel and 68% of tanks, 61% of armored combat vehicles, 69% of large-caliber artillery systems, 57% of large surface ships, and 54% of submarines that the North Atlantic Alliance possesses [22]. This significantly exceeds the number of Russian troops and conventional weapons in Europe.

Attempts to implement the concept of “strategic autonomy” for Europe were blocked by Washington, which achieved confirmation of the dominant role of NATO under the US leadership. Under the American auspices, a new doctrinal document was prepared—NATO 2022 Strategic Concept [23].

The document announced the rejection of the previously proclaimed partnership with our country and stated that “the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro–Atlantic area” [23, p. 4]. In this regard, the need is proclaimed to “strengthen deterrence and defense for all Allies.” The United States announced its intention to increase its troops in Europe to 100 000 people, and the total grouping of NATO troops near the Russian borders will grow to 300 000 [24].

The new strategy proclaims that NATO allies are committed to deploying additional strong combat-

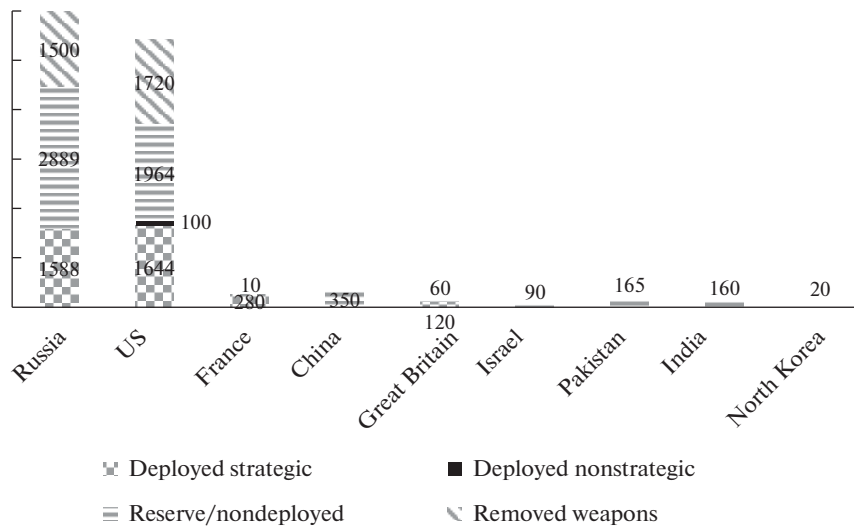


Fig. 1. Estimated global nuclear arsenal in 2022. Based on <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

ready forces on the ground on our eastern flank, building up from existing battlegroups to brigade-level units where and when the need arises, based on convincing, rapidly available reinforcements, prepositioned equipment, and an improved command and control system. We welcome cooperation between frame and host countries in strengthening command and control forces, including the establishment of division-level structures. NATO welcomes initial proposals for a new NATO force model that will strengthen and modernize NATO’s force structure and resources for our next-generation military plans. The alliance will improve its collective defense exercises to be ready for high-intensity operations in various areas and to ensure the strengthening of any NATO member country in a short time. All these steps will significantly enhance NATO’s deterrence and forward defense capabilities [23].

The Madrid summit supported the admission of Sweden and Finland to the North Atlantic Alliance. The line of confrontation between NATO and Russia will more than double. This may lead to increased tension in the Baltic and Northern regions. The current wave of NATO enlargement opens the door for the next invitation to other members of the alliance.

The new NATO document mentions the PRC for the first time, although the Asia–Pacific region (APR) is not included in the geographic scope of the North Atlantic Alliance. The document notes “systemic challenges” posed by China, confronting “our interests, security, and values” and “striving to subvert the rules-based international order” [23, p. 5].

Two points of the strategic concept are devoted to China. At the same time, such harsh language is not applied to Beijing the way it is to Moscow.

For the first time, some US Pacific allies were invited to the NATO summit. In this regard, the document notes that the participation of partners from the APR, along with other partners, has demonstrated the value of our cooperation in countering common security challenges [23, p. 11].

The strategy announces, “The Indo–Pacific is important for NATO, given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro–Atlantic security. We will strengthen dialogue and cooperation with new and existing partners in the Indo–Pacific to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests” [23, p. 11].

Table 1. Share of triangle countries in global indicators in 2021–2022, %

	Population	GDP (PPP)	Exports	R&D	Defense spending	Nuclear weapons
United States	4.3	15.7	10.1	24.5	39	42.7
China	18.4	18.6	12.8	25.5	14	2.7
Russia	1.9	3.1	1.7	2.5	3.4	47

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/04/19/world-economic-outlook-april-2022>; <https://www.rdworlondonline.com/2021-global-rd-funding-forecast-released/>; <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance>; <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

**Table 2.** Share of EU and NATO countries in global indicators, %

	Population	GDP (PPP)	Exports	R&D	Defense spending	Nuclear weapons
United States	4.3	15.7	10.1	24.5	39	42.7
China	18.4	18.6	12.8	25.5	14	2.7
Great Britain	0.9	2.3	3.1	2.1	2.5	1.8
European Union	4.4	12.0	26.0	17.4	15	2.5
NATO	8.8	27.9	36.4	42.5	53	46.8

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/04/19/world-economic-outlook-april-2022>, <https://www.rdworltonline.com/2021-global-rd-funding-forecast-released/>, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance>, <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

**Table 3.** Share of AUKUS, Quad, PBP countries, and China in global indicators, %

	Population	GDP (PPP)	Exports	R&D	Defense spending	Nuclear weapons
United States	4.3	15.7	10.1	24.5	39	42.7
China	18.4	18.6	12.8	25.5	14	2.7
Japan	1.6	3.8	3.3	7.5	2.5	0
India	18.1	7.0	2.4	3.8	3.7	1.3
Great Britain	0.9	2.3	3.1	2.1	2.5	1.8
Australia	1.2	1.9	2.1	1.2	1.5	–
AUKUS	6.4	19.9	15.3	26.7	42.9	45.8
Quad	24.7	44.8	18.9	39.1	49.1	43.9
PBP	8.0	23.7	18.5	34.2	45.4	45.8

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/04/19/world-economic-outlook-april-2022>, <https://www.rdworltonline.com/2021-global-rd-funding-forecast-released/>, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance>, <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

**Table 4.** The share of the BRICS countries in global indicators, %

	Population	GDP (PPP)	Exports	R&D	Defense spending	Nuclear weapons
China	18.4	18.6	12.8	25.5	14	2.7
India	18.1	7.0	2.4	3.8	3.7	1.3
Russia	1.9	3.1	1.7	2.5	3.4	47
RSA	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.1	0
Brazil	2.8	2.4	1.1	1.6	0.9	0
BRICS	42	31.7	18.5	33.7	22.1	51

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/04/19/world-economic-outlook-april-2022>, <https://www.rdworltonline.com/2021-global-rd-funding-forecast-released/>, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance>, <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.



**Table 5.** The triangle and international structures as a percentage of global performance

	Population	GDP (PPP)	Exports	R&D	Defense spending	Nuclear weapons
United States	4.3	15.7	10.1	24.5	39	42.7
China	18.4	18.6	12.8	25.5	14	2.7
Russia	1.9	3.1	1.7	2.5	3.4	47
European Union	4.4	12.0	26.0	17.4	15	2.5
NATO	8.8	27.9	36.4	42.5	53	46.8
AUKUS	6.4	19.9	15.3	26.7	42.9	45.8
Quad	24.7	44.8	18.9	39.1	49.1	43.9
BRICS	42	31.7	18.5	33.7	22.1	51
PBP	8.0	23.7	18.5	34.2	45.4	45.8

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/04/19/world-economic-outlook-april-2022>, <https://www.rdworltonline.com/2021-global-rd-funding-forecast-released/>, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance>, <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

This corresponds to the concept of a triangle and indicates Washington's desire to involve NATO in the confrontation between the United States and China. However, European allies show little enthusiasm for a confrontation with the PRC, which is their biggest trading partner. Perhaps the only exception was Great Britain, which, under B. Johnson, again tried to claim a global role.

#### LATTICEWORK COALITIONS

Washington does not have a powerful military bloc in the Pacific like NATO. However, it should not be forgotten that the United States has bilateral mutual security treaties with Japan and South Korea, which host military bases where approximately 40000 US troops are stationed. However, this is clearly not enough to contain China. In addition, relations between Tokyo and Seoul are very difficult.

Under these conditions, the Biden administration decided to create several coalition formations in the Indo-Pacific region with a predominance of the "Anglo-Saxon component." Former Undersecretary of State Christopher Ford called this innovation "latticework" [25].

The first example of such "latticework" was the AUKUS grouping, which in August 2021 included the United States, Great Britain, and Australia under the pretext of cooperation in the creation of nuclear submarines [26].

The largest coalition is the Quad, consisting of the United States, Australia, Japan, and India. The first summit of the Quad was held in autumn 2021. This is the only group that formally surpasses China in terms

of population by 25%, GDP by 45%, and exports by 19% [27].

Finally, in the summer of 2022, the creation of the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) was announced, which included five countries, including AUKUS members, as well as New Zealand and Japan. This is due to the opposition to the attempts of the PRC to settle in the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific Ocean [28].

Thus, the United States is trying to encircle China. However, they have failed to involve both India and Japan in one coalition at the same time. In addition, none of the groups included Canada and South Korea. Apparently, the Biden administration will continue its efforts to create the broadest possible unified anti-Chinese coalition.

In turn, Moscow and Beijing are also seeking to acquire partners. The BRICS group mentioned above formally has a very impressive potential: 42% of the population, 32% of GDP, and 19% of world exports [1]. In fact, the BRICS group is not in a position to act as a single alliance like NATO.

In addition, the contradictions between China and India are too strong, including the long-standing territorial conflict. Moreover, India has joined the Quad, which is clearly anti-Chinese.

The Russian Federation has common interests with China, but they do not always fully coincide. This, in particular, concerns problems such as Crimea and Taiwan.

It is important to note the emergence of new multinational formats. They do not have the same potential.

## CONCLUSIONS

Some of these structures will not last long, others may have a long way to go and may become real economic and military alliances.

The Congressional Research Service presented its interpretation of the triangle. It states that “the renewed great power rivalry is not a bipolar situation (like the Cold War) or a unipolar situation (like the post-Cold War era), but a situation characterized in substantial part by renewed competition among three major world powers—the United States, China, and Russia.” This situation is described as Cold War 2.0 [15].

I think that we are witnessing a new geopolitical situation where changes can happen quite quickly. It seems to me that the outcome of the special military operation in Ukraine will largely determine the future of relations in the Russia–United States–China triangle.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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*Translated by B. Alekseev*

## Polycentrism versus Universalism in the Picture of the Social World

A. A. Alferov<sup>#</sup>

*Institute of Philosophy and Sociopolitical Studies, Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia*

*e-mail: antal@list.ru*

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**Abstract**—The principle of monocentrism in building a picture of the social world is opposed to the principle of polycentrism. Certain trends substantiating the principle of monocentrism, on the one hand, and the principle of polycentrism, on the other, are considered. The justification of monocentrism is universalism—of man, human consciousness, human history. In anthropology, polycentrism is based on the idea of the socio-cultural conditioning of man, while in the philosophy of history, it is based on the concept of history as the development of individual isolated cultures or civilizations. The multiplicity of civilizations creates a polycentric picture of the social world. Russia is both a state and a civilization. Russia has attracted adjacent states, primarily in the post-Soviet space, into its civilizational field and has become the core state of Eurasian civilization. However, even in isolation, without adjacent states, the Russian Federation is a civilization. Possible contents of the ideology of Russian civilization are also considered.

**Keywords:** universalism, polycentrism, liberalism, civilization, values, Russia

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The main question regarding the future world order is whether it will be, as before, monocentric, or if polycentrism will replace monocentrism. The modern world is changing rapidly, but it is still monocentric. The beneficiary of its monocentricity is Western civilization, which strives to maintain its position at all costs. Russia is not satisfied with its position in the current world system: it strives for a multipolar, polycentric world, hoping that it will become one of its poles or centers. The main complaint of the United States and the collective West against Russia is that it is changing the existing world order.

Within the framework of this article, the author will characterize some of the most important trends and approaches that justify the monocentrism of the social world, on the one hand, and polycentrism, on the other.

### UNIVERSALISM AS A RATIONALE FOR MONOCENTRISM

To substantiate monocentrism, the concept of universalism is used—that of man, humanity, human consciousness, and human history. “The universalist approach has a solid pedigree: in European thought,

it traces its history back to at least the period of classical Greek philosophy and is clearly connected with the Platonic—Aristotelian understanding of the universality of human nature, rooted in the universality of reason” [Smirnov, 2019, p. 25]. The opposite of universalism is particularism, pluralism, and polycentrism. For polycentrism, significant are ideas about the sociocultural differentiation of the human essence.

Under the sign of universalism, Enlightenment ideology was created—a rationalist ideology that appealed to human reason, and this reason was thought of as one, universal. Certain relations between people, a certain state system, certain human rights, etc., were seen by Enlightenment thinkers as reasonable. Sanctified by a single human reason, these specific social institutions were proclaimed universal. Enlightenment thinkers designed their anthropocentric world for an abstract person with a single “human nature” and universal human reason. From such an understanding of man flowed both the unity of humankind and the unity of human history.

Liberalism was genetically connected with the Enlightenment ideology since the Enlightenment thinkers proclaimed liberty one of the “natural” human rights. Both the Enlightenment and liberalism were based on the principle of individualism—the priority of the interests of the individual over the interests of society or a social group. Modern liberalism pins its hopes on the globalization tendencies of our time, see—

<sup>#</sup> Anatolii Aleksandrovich Alferov, Dr. Sci. (Philos.), is a Professor in the Department of Social Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociopolitical Studies, Southern Federal University.

ing in them an opportunity to implement its original setting of unifying the world and humankind.

### VALUE MONISM AND VALUE PLURALISM

Although the general setting of liberalism, of course, has a universalist character, thinkers who introduced the idea of the plurality of the human essence worked within its framework. These should include, first, I. Berlin, a famous philosopher, political scientist, and historian of the 20th century. The most important point that Berlin introduced into political and philosophical thought is the doctrine of negative and positive liberty and his concept of value pluralism. Regarding the topic of this article, the latter is of interest.

The British thinker considered the values, goals, and ideals that people can strive for and that determine their lives. He insisted on the idea that there is a plurality of ideals and goals that people can seek. Berlin argued that in a number of aspects important for people value pluralism is better than value monism. Monism is associated with intolerance for those who hold different values—intolerance fraught with fanaticism. It can also be used to justify the claims of certain people and nations to control society and the world as a whole. Value pluralism, according to Berlin, is associated with tolerance for people who share other values, with respect for other value systems.

However, Berlin argues, the mainstream idea and tradition of Western thought was not pluralism at all but precisely monism, which he characterizes as the central thesis of Western philosophy from Plato to the present day. Concentrating the essence of the intellectual tradition of the West, the British philosopher holds that this tradition is based on three dogmas: (1) there is only one correct answer to any important question (all other answers, being deviations from the truth, turn out to be false); (2) there is a reliable way to get answers to these questions, and the true answers to them, in principle, can be found; (3) the correct answers, if found, must be completely compatible with each other, forming a single harmonious whole: a truth cannot be incompatible with another truth [Berlin, 2013]. When all the answers to the most important moral, social, and political questions are found and people begin to live in accordance with the truths found, a perfect life for people will be established, a perfect society—a golden age will come. Berlin believed that such a unified monistic model of values is indicative of all Western rationalism.

Value pluralism, in turn, means the possibility of a clash between certain values, a conflict between them. It becomes inevitable to make a choice in favor of certain values, while, accordingly, other values will not be actualized or will be realized only partially. The incompatibility of certain essential values brings Berlin to the conclusion that it is impossible to build

a perfect society because it is conceived precisely as the harmonious implementation of all values. He believes that the idea of a perfect world where all benefits can be actualized is unfounded and conceptually inconsistent [Berlin, 2001].

Developing the doctrine of the diversity of values accepted by people tied to different cultures and historical eras, Berlin still tried to preserve the idea of a common human nature. He insisted that even with a plurality of values, there is something in common that all people share just because they are people. Such a value commonality, according to Berlin, expresses what is characteristic of man as such. In other words, the commonality of values is associated with the recognition of the commonality of human nature. This idea of a common human nature, preserved by Berlin, connects him with the tradition of the Age of Enlightenment and places him in the framework of liberalism. He conceived value pluralism within the framework of a liberal–democratic society.

### J. GRAY'S CRITICISM OF UNIVERSALISM AND JUSTIFICATION OF A POLYCENTRIC WORLD

The English political philosopher J. Gray accepts Berlin's idea of value pluralism, but he radicalizes it and takes it beyond the liberal doctrine. Gray's value pluralism appears as a pluralism of cultures, cultural traditions, and lifestyles. What Gray brings to the fore is culture, which, in his opinion, unites people and creates a real community. Enlightenment and liberalism, in turn, share the illusion that devotion to a common foundation can exist without relying on a common culture but only through the recognition of abstract principles. According to liberal–legalist views, we need not a common culture but common laws and rules. Gray, however, is convinced that it is impossible to ensure civil peace in an abstract legal way. In his opinion, the United States, where legalistic ideas are especially strong, is moving towards uncontrollability.

The English philosopher emphasized the connection of liberalism with the Enlightenment, considering liberalism as the embodiment of the Enlightenment project, and neoliberalism as the latest edition of this project. From the Enlightenment, liberalism adopts a certain philosophical anthropology and philosophy of history. From anthropology, it takes ideas about an abstract person, an autonomous individual, devoid of sociocultural definitions. Cultural identities are recognized as insignificant or random in human life and history. This abstract person is then endowed with certain rights, and a social structure is built of these individuals. Of course, this is a purely mental construction, which has a very distant relation to a real person. The abstract person, free from cultural identities, appears in the anthropology of liberalism as a universal person, tailored for all conditions and times. Uni-

versalism, like individualism, is a principle of liberal ideology.

Gray holds that, at the present stage of liberalism, the Enlightenment project is coming to an end, exhausting itself. The inconsistency of its main commitments and beliefs is revealed. It is also refuted by the fact of the current revival of ethnic and religious particularism, which makes the universalism required by liberalism unattainable.

What will establish itself in the world after the final discrediting of the Enlightenment project, that is, liberalism? Gray believes that cultural pluralism will come. Each culture represents a certain set of values, a holistic way of human life. Liberalism is one such way of life, which has developed owing to historical circumstances in certain countries. Gray admits that liberalism will survive in countries where it has a historical basis, but its transformation into one of the traditions is unlikely to be easy and smooth. The claims of liberal societies that they are the rudiments of a single civilization must be forgotten [Grey, 1995]. Nevertheless, other civilizations can borrow elements of liberal practice if they meet their current needs.

Gray understands that the imperatives of technology and market institutions in the modern world are pushing it towards cultural monotony, in which Western culture prevails. However, this trend, in his opinion, must be resisted using political will and political institutions—national and possibly regional—to avoid cultural leveling. The experience of technological and economic development of some modern countries proves that modernization without Westernization is possible.

The diversity of cultures will be manifested, according to Gray, in a variety of forms of the political and state structure. Liberalism recognizes only one of them, the liberal democratic one, which it seeks to spread throughout the world. Pluralism, on the other hand, proceeds from the fact that different cultures may accommodate different forms of government and political regimes.

How will relations between different cultures develop in a multipolar world? Gray hopes that cultures will be able to negotiate, creating conditions for peaceful coexistence. He does not agree with S. Huntington, who believed that with the end of the Cold War between the capitalist and socialist blocs, a struggle between civilizations would begin in the world. According to Gray, the main idea of pluralism is that different cultures should peacefully coexist on Earth without giving up their differences [Gray, 1995].

Gray believes that at present the West is unable to abandon universalist claims and recognize its civilization as only one of many. It is not ready to coexist with other forms of government that do not accept its political culture. The Western tradition is perhaps too stagnant (in terms of its exclusivity) and is not amenable to renewal. Then all we can do is to rely on non-Western

peoples, hoping that Western civilization has not distorted them too much.

## UNIVERSALISM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The most important component of the worldview of liberalism is a certain interpretation of history that is used to justify liberalism and to endow liberal societies with a privileged position in history. This philosophy of history proceeds, in the first place, from the idea of the unity of the global historical process. History in it is conceived as single: it embraces humanity into a common purposeful process that leads to the formation of a cosmopolitan liberal civilization. Further, in the liberal interpretation, history inevitably acquires a Eurocentric character. Liberalism is a product of European development, and if it is declared the goal of world history, then it becomes Eurocentric by default. However, Eurocentrism is also characteristic of most illiberal philosophies of history created by European thinkers. Third, the philosophy of the history of liberalism is based on the idea of social and historical progress, which took hold and began to shape the worldview of people in the Age of Enlightenment. That period perceived itself as an era of the introduction of reason, knowledge, and science and opposed itself to the past, in which, according to the Enlightenment thinkers, ignorance had dominated. Progress is conceived as a movement from lower to higher, from less perfect to more perfect, from worse to better, and this is how social historical development was considered in the Age of Enlightenment. The thinkers of the Enlightenment used the idea of progress to create a new interpretation of history, which was supposed to replace the old religious providential understanding of it. The idea of progress was intended to tie history together in a new way and to give it direction and meaning. At the same time, progress was interpreted as an absolute and supreme value, and now, to justify some phenomenon and give it the right to life, it was only necessary to declare it progressive. However, the idea of progress is always associated with the presence of a criterion: an indicator is needed that could make it possible to determine the superiority of one over the other. In the philosophy of liberalism, the criterion of progress is the introduction of a liberal way of life and an increase in the freedom of the individual. For example, this was how Lord Acton, a famous liberal historian of the second half of the 19th century, tried to present the history of humankind [Acton, 1992].

## THE POLYCENTRIC CIVILIZATIONAL MODEL

The idea of the unity of the global historical process is opposed by a view on history that considers it as the development of separate isolated sociohistorical formations—cultures or civilizations, each of which is

born at a certain moment and then goes along its own way of development. It is obvious that such a model of understanding history is quite consistent with the idea of a polycentric world, which, within the framework of this concept, breaks up into a number of civilizations that act as its poles or centers of power. This model of history in Russian philosophy was developed by N. Ya. Danilevskii, K. N. Leont'ev, and the Eurasians; in Western thought of the 20th century, it was developed by O. Spengler, A. Toynbee, F. Braudel, S. Huntington, and others.

The American political scientist Huntington in his article "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993) [Huntington, 1993] and book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) [Huntington, 1996] argued that, after the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the bloc world (capitalist bloc, socialist bloc, nonaligned countries) was replaced by civilizational disintegration: a world order based on civilizations is emerging, and countries are grouped around the leading or pivotal countries of their civilizations. The most large-scale and dangerous conflicts, Huntington believed, in the current situation will occur between states and their groups belonging to different civilizations. F. Fukuyama's predictions about the end of history are cancelled.

Huntington attributed Western, Sinic, Hindu, Islamic, Japanese, and Orthodox civilizations to the main civilizations of our time; he also singled out Latin American and, possibly, African civilizations [see Huntington, 1996]. He criticizes the concept of a "universal civilization," which is allegedly taking shape in the modern world, showing that this does not actually happen and emphasizing that this concept is a characteristic product of Western civilization. He writes: "Universalism is the ideology of the West for confrontations with non-Western cultures" [Huntington, 1996]; "Western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers three problems: it is false; it is immoral; and it is dangerous" [Huntington, 1996]. The danger of such a belief, according to Huntington, is that it can provoke conflicts and wars between Western civilization and non-Western ones. "The security of the world requires acceptance of global multiculturalism" [Huntington, 1996]. The American political scientist demonstrates that in the 20th century the balance of power between the Western civilization and non-Western ones gradually changed in favor of the latter in various parameters (controlled territory, population, economic potential, military power, political influence, and cultural influence). He believed that this process would continue into the 21st century. Huntington also sharply criticizes the multiculturalism preached in the United States, which rejects the identification of the United States with Western civilization and generally rejects civilizational identity, emphasizing subnational cultural characteristics and groupings defined in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc. He says that multiculturalists

want to create a country devoid of a cultural core and expresses the conviction that no country composed according to this principle will last long [Huntington, 1996]. Since multiculturalists defend group interests and values, they come into conflict with classical liberalism, which puts individual freedoms and rights in the first place; Huntington says that they challenge the core element of the American ideal. The American scientist pointed out that multiculturalism has different meanings inside the country (at home) and outside it, in the outside world. At home, multiculturalism is unacceptable: there must be a common culture, otherwise the country will fall apart. On a global scale, it is necessary since there is no single world, there are different cultures in it. Meanwhile, multiculturalists advocate the diversity of cultures within the country, and globalists (global monoculturalists) seek to universalize the whole world.

Attempts to universalize the world is imperialism, the desire to build a world empire, which can be achieved by a certain civilization that wants to universalize the world as it sees fit. According to the American researcher, imperialism is a logical consequence of universalism.

Huntington understood civilizations as cultural communities—extremely broad cultural integrities, determined by language, religion, value system, customs, and social institutions. He actually identified civilization with culture: "Civilization and culture both refer to the overall way of life of a people, and a civilization is a culture writ large" [Huntington, 1996]. At the same time, following Toynbee, he attached great importance in defining civilization with religion. The American scientist argues that in the modern world cultural identity comes to the fore, and not ideological and political, as it was in the era of confrontation between capitalism and socialism. Peoples and countries now unite and clash on cultural grounds. It seems that Huntington, placing an emphasis on culture and structuring the world under the civilizational paradigm, was inclined to ignore the independent significance of economic and political ties and dependencies. Thus, he tried to prove that only cultural commonality is the basis of economic cooperation, and without it economic ties cannot be built. Referring to regionalization in the modern world, he insisted that regional alliances, which include countries from different civilizations, are ineffective and unstable, that "regions are a basis for cooperation among states only to the extent that geography coincides with culture" [Huntington, 1996]. The author joins those who believe that civilization is not only a cultural community but also a territorial and political one. It is associated with a certain territory. Civilization is a certain (extremely wide) community of people, and this community can be formed not only on the basis of culture but also on other types of identity—territorial, ethnic, economic, social, political, and ideological.

## THE CIVILIZATIONAL VIEW OF THE EURASIANS

The territorial aspect of the civilizational community was emphasized by the Eurasians—Russian emigrant thinkers of the 1920s–1930s (N.S. Trubetskoi, P.N. Savitskii, P.P. Suvchinskii, G.V. Vernadsky, N.N. Alekseev, and others). They put forward the idea of Eurasia as a special geographical and cultural entity, which is part of the Old World. According to Savitskii, Eurasia includes four natural zones: tundra, forests, steppes, and deserts, stretching in the horizontal direction and extending from the Black Sea–Baltic Sea intermarium in the west to the Far East; in the south, this territory is framed by mountain ranges [Savitskii, 2002a]. Russia as a special civilization is connected with it. From ancient times, the territory was inhabited by different peoples who interacted with each other in one way or another and then ended up as part of the Russian state. The Eurasianists developed the idea of a special path of development of Russia–Eurasia, different from both the West (Europe) and Asia (China, India, Islamic countries).

The geography of Eurasia, according to Savitskii, pushes its inhabitants to create a single political, economic, and cultural association, and in recent centuries this association has been carried out by Russia. The Eurasianists were convinced that Eurasia should be politically united, that it needed a powerful centralized state that would hold this large territory, protect borders, and develop communications and the economy. The state in the Eurasian concept was not just a collection of individuals or a political mechanism but a historical, cultural, economic, and, of course, political integrity (in the terminology of the Eurasians, *symphonic personality*).

The most important thesis of the Eurasian concept of the organization of Russia was the idea of autarky (from the Greek *αυτάρκεια*, self-satisfaction). Russia, according to the founders of this movement, cannot afford to be dependent on the world market. It must have an independent powerful economy and its own extensive domestic market. This model will provide it with economic and political independence and a guaranteed opportunity for economic growth; otherwise, Russia risks becoming a peripheral zone of neighboring powers. Autarky, as the Eurasians emphasized, may well be established on the territory of Eurasia because this territory is provided with all the natural resources necessary for development, with a variety of soils and climate [see Savitskii, 2002b].

The Eurasianists also emphasized the importance of ideology in uniting this space and creating a civilizational community on it. They believed that the Eurasian state should be ideocratic, that is, it should obey a certain ideology and unite around it. Considering the question of what requirements this ideology should meet, Trubetskoi said that it cannot express the interests of a race, a certain people, a social class, or

humanity as a whole but must pursue “the benefit of the totality of peoples inhabiting this autarkic special world” [Trubetskoi, 2007, pp. 619, 620]. He meant the unification of the peoples of Eurasia into one supra-ethnic cultural community (“multinational nation”), which has a common Eurasian consciousness. Trubetskoi noted that the feeling of belonging to this whole is quite compatible with the feeling of belonging to one’s own people, which is aware of itself as a member of this multinational whole. The most important role in uniting the peoples of Eurasia was, of course, to be played by the Eurasian state and the Eurasian ideology. Justifying the commonality of Eurasia, representatives of this movement emphasized elements of ethnographic and psychotypical proximity, the mixing of Russians with Finno-Ugric peoples and Turks, as well as their difference from Western and Southern Slavs.

A.G. Dugin, developing the concept of a multipolar world [Dugin, 2013], states that, in the new emerging world, the nation-state ceases to be a subject; therefore, the system of international relations formed on the basis of the Westphalian peace treaty, which recognized the sovereignty of nation-states, needs to be revised. Dugin means that the true subjects of international relations and the true sovereigns in a multipolar world are civilizations. Proceeding from this, he concludes that the weakening of nation-states can have a positive side. It seems, however, that the weakening of the role of the state should not be welcomed, just as the Westphalian system should not be buried, because it implies noninterference in the internal affairs of a state by other states, and Russia acts in the international arena as a state, and actions within the framework of this system are still carried out predominantly on behalf of states. It is also important that globalists seek to destroy the system of nation-states. Thus, Fukuyama at one time proclaimed that the Westphalian system was no longer relevant, but at the same time he kept in mind not a multicivilizational, but a unipolar world controlled by Western politicians and corporations without interference from nation-states. First of all, it is states, especially the core states of non-Western civilizations, that hinder the abolition of all large communities of people and the movement towards the transformation of humanity into an amorphous mass of atomic individuals without any identity.

## THE PLACE OF RUSSIA IN THE POLYCENTRIC PICTURE OF THE WORLD

What is Russia—a state (of course, multiethnic) or a civilization? Both. It acts as a civilization coinciding with the state, or a civilizational state. Being the center of power, Russia has attracted neighboring states—primarily those located in the post-Soviet space—into its civilizational field and has become the pivotal state of the Eurasian civilization. At the same time, the Rus-



sian Federation is a civilization on its own, without adjoining states. Civilizations consisting of one state are possible. J.M. Barroso said at the Russia–EU conference in 2013 that Russia is a continent that pretends to be a country; Russia is a civilization disguised as a nation [see Sushentsov, 2016]. Shevchenko writes, “Russia is a huge and very complex state–civilization, which consists of a number of unique worlds—ethnic, religious, and regional (Siberia, the Far East, the Caucasus) [Spiridonova et al., 2016, p. 112]. He also notes that a state that recognizes itself as a civilization endows itself with new properties—“new creative functions, value orientations, and spiritual meanings” [Spiridonova et al., 2016, p. 6]. It acquires a mission—to preserve and develop its civilization.

The Russian conflict with Western countries has a civilizational background. Russia represents a different, non-Western civilization, which the West has always known. Until recently, we doubted it. Western civilization is aggressive. It is accustomed to dominating the world, and Western countries accept relations with their neighbor Russia “on an equal footing” only under the pressure of necessity. When Russia became a socialist country and headed the socialist camp, the difference in the social systems came to the fore in its confrontation with the West. Then, when the Russian social system became of the same type, the former, civilizational reason returned.

#### THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CIVILIZATION: CIVILIZATIONAL RUSSIAN IDEOLOGY

As was mentioned earlier, a civilization is a territorial, historical, political, economic, cultural, and ideological community. All these aspects are present in the current Russian civilization, except for the latter. Meanwhile, the ideological aspect is very important, as it ensures the unity and cohesion of the civilizational community and its self-identification. Dugin is right when he notes that civilization in a certain sense is a construct [Dugin, 2013, p. 120]: “A civilization is what needs to be created. However, this process of creating civilizations does not involve a completely artificial model, completely absent in reality. There is a cultural, sociological, historical, mental, psychological basis for civilizations, and it is empirically fixed” [Dugin, 2013, p. 121]. He also points to the role of the intellectual and political elite in the creation of a civilizational identity. The fact that Russian civilization can, at a minimum, coincide with the Russian state is its undoubted plus, which greatly facilitates construction. It is only necessary to bring together and consolidate the peoples inhabiting this state. Both Chinese and Indian civilizations are of a similar nature—they can, in principle, coincide with the main state. In turn, the Islamic civilization does not have this property, and this is its minus, which makes the very possibility

of such a civilization problematic since the Islamic world is stretched over a very large area and includes very different countries. There is no political center in it, just as there are no universally recognized core states; moreover, confessional disintegration and struggle take place. The European Union is gradually moving towards formalization as a state. Brussels is gaining and retaining state functions, which, of course, gives rise to resistance from individual EU member states. What these processes will lead to—the actual emergence of a pan-European state, the collapse of the European Union, or some kind of transformation—is now difficult to predict.

What kind of ideology can civilizational Russian ideology be? First of all, note what it should not be. It should not coincide with the dominant ideology of Western civilization because today it is openly hostile towards Russia, as, indeed, before, and its ideology has an offensive, conquest-focused character, claims to be universal, and is used to subjugate other countries and nations and the whole world. It demonstrated its aggressive qualities very prominently when moving around the world—of course, relying on the power of Western civilization. The very fact of adopting this ideology would mean submission to the Western world. At the same time, note that the ideology of liberalism itself made it easier for us, as well as for other civilizations, to reject it because in its development it has acquired extreme forms that make it completely unacceptable for non-Western people—as well as for many people in the Western world too.

The above first condition can be considered negative for the content of the ideology of the Russian civilization. The positive side of this ideology is, in the first place, that it substantiates the integrity and specificity of the world that received the name *Russia*, as well as the belonging and vital involvement in this world of all the peoples that inhabit Russia and created it. This world should be presented as a sovereign civilization of the globe—a civilization capable of expansion. As for the specific values that should fill this ideology, the most important condition is that they be acceptable to all the peoples that form this civilization and that they do not stir rejection in anyone. This condition is seemingly difficult to fulfill because there are many peoples, and some of them were formed in the bosom of Orthodoxy, while others in Islam, still others in Buddhism, and still others preserve early tribal beliefs. In fact, it is not difficult to find values that are shared by all, very diverse, peoples of Russia—and which are present in all beliefs. These values are associated with veneration of ancestors, family, love for the homeland, cooperation and mutual assistance, kindness, courage, loyalty, and protection of the weak. An ideology can be built on them, counting on the fact that it will be close to all the peoples inhabiting our country and will effectively perform an integrating social function. These values are traditional; they are justified by the past and the overwhelming array of

human experience. The ideology that absorbs them can conditionally be called traditionalist. It will not return us to a traditional society and is quite applicable to modern conditions of life. At the same time, it directly opposes the ideology that the Western world is trying to establish—an ideology that is based on ultra-individualism, LGBTQ identities, radical feminism, the destruction of the traditional family, defamation of childbearing, proclaiming the priority of minorities over the majority, and dehumanizing man and turning him into something else (so-called transhumanism).

It is also important that the Russian ideology built in this way will contribute to the rapprochement of Russia with other non-Western civilizations, which are also under pressure from Western ideology and seek to counteract it, relying on their fundamental values. In the concert of anti-Western forces, Russia can also play a leading role. It can also become a refuge for those people from Western countries who cannot accept the latest delights of Western ideology.

### CONCLUSIONS

Universalism and polycentrism are directly opposite pictures of the sociohistorical world. Liberalism embraces universalism. In anthropology, universalism presupposes the universal immutable nature of man; in axiology, it implies value monism; and in the philosophy of history, a single universal history. Polycentrism in anthropology proceeds from the idea of the sociocultural and historical conditioning of man; in axiology, it implies value pluralism; and in the philosophy of history, a civilizational model of thinking of history. Universalism accepts the idea of a “universal civilization” (liberal); polycentrism recognizes the plurality of civilizations, each of which is unique and represents an independent world center.

In the polycentric picture of the world, Russia is a separate civilization, acting simultaneously as a state and as a civilization. By expanding its influence to neighboring countries, Russia is forming a Eurasian civilization.

An important factor in the formation of any civilization is ideology. Russian civilization cannot accept the ideology of liberalism; its civilizational ideology must be based on the traditional values of the peoples inhabiting Russia.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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## Transregional Processes

# The Main Vectors of the US Foreign Policy Strategy in Central Asia

A. A. Kokoshin<sup>a, b, \*</sup> and Z. A. Kokoshina<sup>c, \*\*, #</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, Russia

<sup>b</sup> Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia

<sup>c</sup> Institute of Sociology, Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

\*e-mail: aakokoshin@gmail.com

\*\*e-mail: zlata.kokoshina77@gmail.com

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**Abstract**—The main vectors of the US foreign policy strategy regarding the countries of Central Asia (CA) after the collapse of the Soviet Union are analyzed. It is noted that there are three main vectors in the US strategy in Central Asia: geopolitical, economic, and political–ideological, and humanitarian, which in many cases are closely intertwined with each other. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are of the main interest to the United States there. The authors draw attention to the fact that the US strategy in this region has an obvious anti-Russian and anti-Chinese orientation, which has intensified during the crisis of 2021–2022, caused by the refusal of the United States and its allies to meet the legitimate claims of the Russian Federation adequately to ensure its security.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, US strategy, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, energy resources, geopolitical positions, political and ideological impact, social and humanitarian sphere, nongovernment organizations

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### INTRODUCTION

The three main vectors of the US foreign policy strategy in Central Asia (CA) can be defined as follows:

*Geopolitical vector*, which manifests itself in diplomatic activity and efforts in the field of military and armaments cooperation.

*The economic vector* is mainly expressed in the interest of the American state and business in the maximum possible control over the very significant energy resources of Central Asia, primarily Kazakhstan with its deposits of natural gas, oil, and uranium.

With regard to *the political, ideological, and humanitarian vector*, we primarily mean the US long-term plan to “democratize” CA countries along the West–East lines.

All these vectors have an obvious anti-Russian (and anti-Chinese) bias.

In geopolitical terms, CA is dominated by Russia in the first place, which has very important bilateral relations in the political–military sphere, as well as in the field of security with each of the Central Asian countries, former Soviet republics. The Russian Federation

prevails in armaments cooperation with these countries and provides them with considerable assistance in training personnel for law enforcement agencies. There are important military facilities of the Russian Federation on the territory of the Central Asian countries (especially in Kazakhstan). In addition to bilateral ties with the Central Asian countries, in the geopolitical vector Russia has formats such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (with the participation of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (which, in addition to those mentioned, also includes Uzbekistan). Evidence of Russia’s significant influence in Central Asia was the successfully conducted CSTO peacekeeping operation for a short time at the request of the leadership of Kazakhstan in January 2022. As is known, the Russian contingent played a leading role in this operation.

As for the economic vector, China’s presence in Central Asia is becoming more and more noticeable, both directly through the state line and through private companies that are massively supported by the state. However, as before, the main role in this area is played by the economic relations of the Central Asian countries with the Russian Federation, both bilateral and within the framework of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (in which Central Asia is represented by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan).

<sup>#</sup> RAS Academician Andrei Afanas’evich Kokoshin is Deputy Director for Science of HSE University and Head of the Department of International Security at the Faculty of World Politics, Moscow State University. Zlata Andreevna Kokoshina is a Researcher at the RAS Institute of Sociology.

Russia manages to hold significant positions in this region in the political, ideological, and humanitarian areas as well despite the large-scale efforts of US government and especially nongovernment organizations.

Among the most important instruments of US influence on the Central Asian countries is the political format C5 + 1 (CA5 + USA), created by Washington in 2015. It also provides for regular meetings of the foreign ministers of the Central Asian countries and the US Secretary of State [Yunyushkina et al., 2021, p. 46].

In February 2020, the US Strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025, adopted by the Trump Administration, was published. The presentation of this document took place in the Heritage research and advocacy center, close to the Republicans.<sup>1</sup> There is much evidence that the provisions of this strategy retain their significance under the Biden Administration.

### GEOPOLITICAL VECTOR

This vector of the US foreign policy strategy in Central Asia was initially associated with the desire of the United States to impede the reintegration efforts of Russia in the post-Soviet space, limiting Russia's influence in Central Asia in every possible way. As China's economic and military power and foreign policy influence grow, the United States increasingly faces the task of preventing the further strengthening of the PRC in this region, which is becoming increasingly significant and multifaceted in terms of mutual trade and Chinese investment [Ryazantsev et al., 2019, pp. 20–35]. This is part of the growing global confrontation between the United States and China, which is becoming more and more acute and large scale.

The setting for counteracting reintegration processes with the leading role of Russia is expressed in the formula of ensuring independence and “individual sovereignty.” The aforementioned US strategy in Central Asia aims to “support and strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian States, individually and as a region,” which should be carried out “with consistent US engagement on economic, energy, security, democracy, and governance issues” of the Central Asian states. As follows from this document, the United States seeks to increase its influence in Central Asia under the pretext of helping to “reduce terrorist threats” for the countries of this region. This is explained as a bilateral activity to understand, identify, prevent, and counter “violent extremism.” The document also envisages joint efforts of the United States and the Central Asian countries to “return, rehabilitate, and reintegrate foreign terrorist fighters and their families into society” and to “strengthen the

capacity of law enforcement and security services to protect borders and interdict the movement of terrorists and trafficking into and across Central Asia.”<sup>2</sup>

For a long time, the geopolitical direction of the US foreign policy strategy was closely connected with the military actions of the United States and its allies and partners in Afghanistan after the acts of “megateror” on September 11, 2001, as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. Since the start of this operation, the Central Asian countries have been viewed by Washington mainly as a “gateway” to Afghanistan, where the United States and its allies conducted rather large-scale military operations against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban [Rumer et al., 2016]. The military actions of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan continued with varying degrees of intensity until August 2021, when everything ended in the virtual flight of the United States from this country and the collapse of the pro-Western regime in the face of the military and political successes of the Taliban movement.

Immediately after 9/11, the United States began negotiating agreements with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to use existing bases and deploy troops in support of the war in Afghanistan. It was about the Manas airfield in Kyrgyzstan and the Karshi-Khanabad base in Uzbekistan, which were supposed to perform the functions of supplying and supporting the actions of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup>

Soon the United States signed a number of agreements not only on military bases but also on the use of airspace and the logistics of its contingents at these bases in Central Asia [Cooley, 2021].

A. Cooley believes that the then President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, saw his new partnership with the United States as an opportunity to give legitimacy to his domestic line against Islamist extremist militants [Cooley, 2021].

In May 2005, against the backdrop of antigovernment protests, Islamists attempted to seize power in the city of Andijan; the attempt was severely suppressed by Karimov and his security forces. After such actions of the Uzbek authorities in Andijan, Washington announced the need for an independent investigation of the events at the OSCE level. This caused an extremely negative reaction from Karimov, who quickly demanded that the American presence on the territory of Uzbekistan be curtailed by December 2005. The United States was compelled to satisfy this demand. As a result, Washington lost a very important

<sup>1</sup> Trump administration launches Central Asia strategy at Heritage (2020). <https://www.heritage.org/asia/impact/trump-administration-launches-central-asia-strategy-heritage>. Cited January 19, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> United States strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025: Advancing sovereignty and economic prosperity (overview) (2020), US Department of State, February 5. <https://www.state.gov/united-states-strategy-for-central%20asia-2019-2025-advancing-sovereignty-and-economic-prosperity/>. Cited March 11, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> United States foreign policy in the states of Central Asia (2002), The Brookings Institution, November 12. <https://www.brookings.edu/events/united-states-foreign-policy-in-the-states-of-central-asia/>. Cited May 12, 2022.

military facility. Part of the personnel of the Karshi-Khanabad base was transferred to Kyrgyzstan, to the Manas international airport.

Relations between the United States and Uzbekistan deteriorated over more than a decade.

An agreement with Kyrgyzstan on the provision of a part of the Manas civil airport for basing military personnel and military equipment participating in the operation in Afghanistan was concluded on December 4, 2001, for a year with the possibility of further automatic prolongation. Bishkek also allowed the passage of American aircraft through its airspace [Shukurov, 2022]. According to Sh. Z. Shukurov, there were no objections from Russia because at that time “the United States was perceived as a victim of terrorist acts” [Shukurov, 2022].

Bishkek also agreed to base the forces and means of 11 other countries in addition to the United States in Manas; in general, about 1000 military personnel and several military transport aircraft and tanker aircraft were constantly present at this airbase.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, largely under the influence of Russia, the US base at Manas was closed in 2014. Thus ended the permanent military presence of the United States in the region.

Returning to US relations with Uzbekistan, we can note that they began to improve after the death of Karimov, with the coming to power of Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, who visited the United States in September 2017 to attend the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly and met there with the President of the United States D. Trump, as well as with the leadership of a number of large American companies. These meetings resulted in agreements on investments in the economy of Uzbekistan in the amount of \$2.6 bln [Iztelulova and Lapenko, 2021].

In May 2018, Mirziyoyev’s first official visit to Washington took place. As a result of his negotiations with Trump, a Joint Statement of the heads of both states—Uzbekistan and the United States: The Start of a New Era of Strategic Partnership—was adopted. Several agreements were signed aimed at developing ties between the two countries in various fields. Among them is a five-year plan for military cooperation.

As a result of Mirziyoyev’s visit to Washington in 2018, the number of joint military exercises between Uzbekistan and the United States has increased sharply, their main goal being to strengthen cooperation in the field of security and improve interaction between the two countries. In January 2019, servicemen of the special operations forces of the Ministry of Defense of Uzbekistan took part in the Southern

Strike joint exercise at the military base Camp Shelby (Mississippi). On September 10 of the same year, American and Uzbek pilots conducted joint exercises in the Chirchiq garrison near Tashkent [Gegelashvili and Modnikova, 2021]. In March 2020, the joint exercises of the United States and Uzbekistan Invincible Sentry 2020 were also held on the territory of Uzbekistan.

On a rather significant scale, training of the military personnel of Uzbekistan is carried out in the United States; American military instructors teach at military educational institutions in Uzbekistan [Ponomarev, 2020].

As for Kazakhstan, the United States has made significant political and military efforts in this direction. Back in 2000, before the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, with the participation of the United States and other NATO members, a KAZBAT battalion was formed in Kazakhstan on the basis of the third air assault battalion of the Kapshagai air assault brigade according to NATO standards and to solve joint tasks with NATO.<sup>5</sup> This battalion was involved in two projects: sending a unit to Iraq and conducting the annual Steppe Eagle peacekeeping exercises in Kazakhstan together with contingents of NATO countries. In August 2003, Kazakhstan sent KAZBAT troops to Iraq as part of the US-led coalition [Stein, 2018]. In December 2006, KAZBAT was transformed into KAZBRIG (two more battalions were added to it, also armed and equipped according to NATO standards) [Stein, 2018].

In 2003–2019, within the framework of military cooperation between the United States and Kazakhstan, Steppe Eagle joint exercises were regularly held with the participation of contingents from other countries. In 2020 and 2021, during the coronavirus pandemic, the exercises were not conducted.

Military specialists from the United States and other NATO countries are actively working in several training centers for personnel of the armed forces of Kazakhstan.<sup>6</sup>

Of all the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan is the main recipient of US military assistance.<sup>7</sup>

State Duma Deputy G. Onishchenko drew attention to the functioning of the laboratory built by the US Department of Defense near Almaty, which

<sup>4</sup> Manas air base on the territory of Kyrgyzstan (2013), ITAR TASS, November 14. [https://tass.ru/info/751517?utm\\_source=yandex.ru&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=yandex.ru&utm\\_referrer=yandex.ru](https://tass.ru/info/751517?utm_source=yandex.ru&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=yandex.ru&utm_referrer=yandex.ru). Cited January 21, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Popov, D. (2013) KAZBRIG as an indicator of the military-political rapprochement between Kazakhstan and the USA, RISS, December 23. <https://riss.ru/article/7713/>?. Cited January 23, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Mukhin, V. (2021) NATO forces are waiting in Nur-Sultan in July, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 20. [https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-05-20/1\\_8153\\_nato.html](https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-05-20/1_8153_nato.html)?. Cited January 23, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Umarov, T. (2021) Everyone’s friend: Will Russia and China be able to force the US out of Kazakhstan, Carnegie Moscow Center Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 27. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84968>. Cited January 23, 2022.

“develops military biological formulations.”<sup>8</sup> There are objects of this kind in many other countries of the world (during a special military operation of the Russian Armed Forces, they were discovered in Ukraine). Countries hosting such American facilities receive “official assistance” in organizing the accounting and safe storage of microbial collections, in reconstructing laboratory facilities, and in training specialists. The United States seeks to obtain complete control over the sanitary and epidemiological situation and research in the respective country. The United States seeks to replenish its collections of biomaterials, to study the susceptibility of residents to various diseases and their treatments, and to test innovative drugs on the local population.<sup>9</sup>

Russia has repeatedly noted that such activities are a violation by the United States of the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction.

In May 2021, the well-informed American *Wall Street Journal* reported that Washington was considering deployment options for its troops that the United States was going to withdraw from Afghanistan, with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as a priority. According to the sources who provided this information to the newspaper, deployment in these countries will allow the United States to respond quickly to what is happening in Afghanistan since they share common borders with the country.<sup>10</sup> Later, a statement from the Uzbek Ministry of Defense said that the United States had approached Uzbekistan. However, it was stated that the appearance of US military facilities on the territory of the country is out of the question.<sup>11</sup>

In his speech on March 31, 2022, at a meeting of Afghanistan’s neighbors (Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) in China, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov said that “Moscow considers unacceptable the deployment of the military infrastructure of NATO, the United States, or the Afghans working for them in

neighboring countries, primarily in the states of Central Asia.”<sup>12</sup>

## ECONOMIC VECTOR

Within this vector, the United States and American business have mostly been interested in the raw materials of the Central Asian countries, primarily Kazakhstani hydrocarbons. In some cases, the geopolitical use of these resources in the interests of the United States and its allies is being considered.

In 2019, Kazakhstan ranked 12th in the world in terms of proven reserves of oil and gas condensate with a production volume of 90.5 million tons of oil, exporting 72.4% of the liquid fuel produced. In terms of proven reserves of natural gas, Kazakhstan in 2019 ranked 22nd in the world; gas production in the same year reached 56.4 billion cubic meters. Kazakhstan also ranks 8th in the world in coal production. The total volume of recoverable reserves of fuel resources (oil, gas, coal, and uranium) of Kazakhstan is estimated at about 32 billion tons of oil equivalent (TOE) [Zhanbulatova et al., 2021, p. 21]. As noted on the website of the Energy Information Administration of the US Department of Energy, Kazakhstan “has the second largest oil reserves and the second largest oil production after Russia among the former Soviet republics.”<sup>13</sup>

Kazakhstan, according to American data, has 12% of the world’s uranium resources; since 2009, it has been the world leader in uranium production, up to 43% of world production.<sup>14</sup> In 1997, the President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, nationalized a large part of the uranium industry, creating Kazatomprom (KAP). This state-owned holding mines uranium in the country together with the Canadian company Uranium One, which has been 100% owned by Russian Rosatom since 2013.<sup>15</sup> According to some reports, a Kazakh–Chinese joint venture also operates in this sphere.

<sup>8</sup> G. Onishchenko: US biolaboratories in the CIS countries are dangerous—COVID has shown what viruses are capable of. (2021), Internet portal of the CIS, May 19. <https://e-cis.info/news/566/92233/>. Cited January 23, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Milov, K. (2021) Violation by the United States of America of the Conventions on the Prohibition of Chemical and Biological Weapons, *Foreign Military Review*, No. 6, 34. <https://zvo.ric.mil.ru/Nomera/2/>. Cited January 23, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Salama, V. and Gordon, L. (2021) Afghan pullout leaves U.S. looking for other places to station its troops, *Wall Street Journal*, May 8. [https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghan-pullout-leaves-u-s-looking-for-other-places-to-station-its-troops-11620482659?mod=searchresults\\_pos3&page=1](https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghan-pullout-leaves-u-s-looking-for-other-places-to-station-its-troops-11620482659?mod=searchresults_pos3&page=1). Cited March 11, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Belen’kaya, M. and Krivosheev, K. (2021) Aid base extended to Washington, *Kommersant*, July 17. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4907714>. Cited February 17, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov during the plenary session at a meeting in the format of the neighboring countries of Afghanistan (Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Website of the Russian Foreign Ministry, March 30 (2022). [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/rso/nato/1807302/?lang=ru](https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1807302/?lang=ru). Cited April 3, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Background reference: Kazakhstan (2019) U.S. Energy Information Administration, January 7. [https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries\\_long/Kazakhstan/background.htm](https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Kazakhstan/background.htm). Cited March 11, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Central Asia: Background and US relations, Congressional Research Service, September 24 (2021). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46924>. Cited March 11, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Nikiforov, O. (2022) Kazakh uranium factor in political protests, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 7. [https://www.ng.ru/ng\\_energiya/2022-02-07/9\\_8365\\_factor.html](https://www.ng.ru/ng_energiya/2022-02-07/9_8365_factor.html). Cited April 23, 2022.

Since 1993, most investment in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector has come from the United States.<sup>16</sup> Major American energy companies such as Chevron and Exxon-Mobile are among the key players in Kazakhstan's oil sector.<sup>17</sup>

The United States enjoys a significant presence in many other sectors of the Kazakh economy.

A significant strengthening of the US position in Kazakhstan was the result of Nazarbayev's "equal-vector policy"—with all his outward demonstration of special loyalty to Russia and initiatives in the development of Eurasian integration. According to many estimates, the positions of the Russian Federation in Kazakhstan and in Central Asia as a whole remain predominant in comparison with the United States and other Western countries. Thus, Head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lavrov stressed that "the volume of economic ties now being built between the United States and the European Union and Central Asia is incomparable with our economic interpenetration, but the goal set [by the West] is unambiguous—to weaken our ties with our allies and strategic partners in every possible way."<sup>18</sup>

Many in the United States and European Union take a stand for making gas from Turkmenistan an alternative to Russian gas. A trans-Caspian pipeline is proposed for the European market (then through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and beyond). It is hoped that this will be facilitated by the agreement concluded in 2021 (after lengthy and difficult negotiations) between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on the joint exploitation of gas fields along the sea border in the Caspian Sea.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE POLITICAL–IDEOLOGICAL AND HUMANITARIAN VECTOR

The end of the Cold War not only failed to weaken but even strengthened this vector in US foreign policy as a whole, which was also reflected in the American strategy in relation to the Central Asian countries.

Since the Clinton Administration (the 1990s), the United States has been guided by the promotion of Western "democratic values" to Central Asia, which has been stably maintained by both government and nongovernment actors for many years.

<sup>16</sup>Time to share: Who is fighting for the energy resources of Kazakhstan (2022) RIA Novosti, January 15. <https://ria.ru/20220115/kazakhstan-1767874161.html>. Cited April 5, 2022.

<sup>17</sup>What does the US mean for Kazakhstan? Figures and facts (2019), Forbes Kazakhstan, September 25. [https://forbes.kz/life/opinion/chto\\_znachit\\_ssha\\_dlya\\_kazahstana\\_tsifry\\_i\\_faktyi?](https://forbes.kz/life/opinion/chto_znachit_ssha_dlya_kazahstana_tsifry_i_faktyi?) Cited April 5, 2022.

<sup>18</sup>The countries of Central Asia and the US noted the success of the C5 + 1 format (2021), ITAR TASS, May 4. [https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/11307235?utm\\_source=yandex.ru&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=yandex.ru&utm\\_referrer=yandex.ru](https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/11307235?utm_source=yandex.ru&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=yandex.ru&utm_referrer=yandex.ru). Cited March 11, 2022.

<sup>19</sup>Central Asia: Background and US Relations (2021) Congressional Research Service, September 24. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46924>. Cited March 11, 2022.

The US strategic line for active political and ideological influence on the Central Asian countries in the above-mentioned US Strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025 is expressed in the following formula: "Strong democratic institutions, the rule of law, and respect for human rights."<sup>20</sup> At the same time, according to V.A. Ponomarev, in recent years Washington and American NGOs have shown respect for the "special path of development" of the Central Asian countries, and the impact on these countries in the political, ideological, and humanitarian spheres has become more flexible. However, it remains constant and purposeful and is expressed in pressure on the countries of the region with reminders of the need to liberalize national legislation regulating the electoral process, create "free media," "a multiparty political system," etc. [Ponomarev, 2020, p. 453].

There is much evidence that American organizations seek to present the domestic and foreign policy of the Russian Federation in an unfavorable light to the population of the Central Asian countries, especially in the context of the aggravation by the United States and the "collective West" of relations with the Russian Federation in connection with the crisis associated with Ukraine. Many attacks were made against the actions of the CSTO to help stabilize the situation in Kazakhstan in January 2022.

Washington is exerting various kinds of pressure on the Central Asian countries so that they do not act bypassing Western sanctions against Russia, which in the aggregate are actually an economic war against the Russian Federation.

According to a number of estimates, over the past 30 years, the United States has allocated about \$9 billion in state aid to the Central Asian countries to implement "democratic reforms," "maintain social and economic growth," and to ensure security and humanitarian purposes [Yunyushkina et al., 2021, p. 43]. At the same time, many Western and Asian allies and partners of the United States are acting in this area in a similar spirit, demonstrating the existence of a "value delimitation" of the "collective West" with Russia and China [Pantin, 2021, pp. 8–15]. The US government and nongovernment organizations have very significant financial resources and also attract funds from large American businesses [Velikaya, 2019, pp. 16–18].

In the Central Asian countries, there are US government organizations such as the Agency for International Development and the US Information Agency. As for the Peace Corps, out of the five countries in the region, it operates only in Kyrgyzstan. The activities of the Peace Corps were terminated in 2011 in Kazakh-

<sup>20</sup>United States strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025: Advancing sovereignty and economic prosperity (overview), U.S. Department of State, February 5 (2020). <https://www.state.gov/united-states-strategy-for-central%20-asia-2019-2025-advancing-sovereignty-and-economic-prosperity/>. Cited May 21, 2022.

stan and in 2012 in Turkmenistan. The United States hopes to restore its presence in Uzbekistan, where it operated in 1992–2005. The only Central Asian country where the Peace Corps has not yet begun to operate is Tajikistan [Velikaya, 2019, p. 18].

Political and propaganda activities in the Central Asian countries are also carried out directly by the American embassies in these countries. They are also represented in the most popular social networks of the post-Soviet space. Radio Liberty, an information tool of the US foreign policy strategy, is actively working in all languages of this region; there is also an online version of the Voice of America in Uzbek and Persian [Bakhirev, 2018, p. 35].

As for American nongovernment organizations in Central Asia, their number is especially large in Kazakhstan. American NGOs such as Azattyk (branches of Radio Liberty, United States), Present Time (subsidiary of Liberty), Eurasia, and many others are active in Central Asia. Notable is the activity of the National Endowment for Democracy. These organizations are also characterized by an anti-Chinese orientation.<sup>21</sup>

The Soros Foundation—Kazakhstan activities occupy a prominent place. According to the official reporting of this fund, it spent about \$100 million in Kazakhstan from 1995 to 2020.<sup>22</sup> As D. Rodionov notes, for a long time this fund has been engaged particularly in the formation of a negative attitude of Kazakh society to the joint operation of the Baikonur cosmodrome with Russia.<sup>23</sup>

In the social and humanitarian sphere, in addition to the Eurasia Foundation, the Council for International Research and Scientific Exchanges (IREX) is actively operating in Central Asia, implementing projects to develop education, in which government institutions and relevant ministries act as partners [Silakov, 2021, p. 116].

As V. Komleva notes, foreign financing of the activities of public organizations in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is under the close attention of the state. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, since 2019, legislation has been changing toward strengthening accounting and control over foreign investments in NGOs [Komleva, 2021, p. 5].

There are three significant universities in the region under strong and in many ways direct influence of the United States: American University of Central Asia (AUCA, Bishkek), Kazakh–American University

(KAU, Almaty), and Kazakhstan Institute of the World Economy and Entrepreneurship (KIMEP, Almaty). Note that the American University in Bishkek is not accountable to the Ministry of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan; it has an American board of trustees. At Nazarbayev University, one of the leading universities in Kazakhstan, just like at KIMEP, teaching is conducted in English. Among the influential American humanitarian structures in Central Asia in the field of science and education is the American Central Asian Educational Foundation [Velikaya, 2019].

The US Strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025 notes that the American University in Bishkek is “a growing hub for the region’s best young minds to earn US degrees, gain in-demand business skills, and create life-long regional affiliations.”<sup>24</sup>

US government and nongovernment organizations in every possible way encourage the visits of Central Asian residents to the United States and large-scale study of the English language. Central Asians have made about 1.4 million visits to the United States, according to the State Department. Since independence by the Central Asian countries, over 40000 students, professionals, and government officials from these countries have received US funding “to visit the United States for professional development opportunities.”<sup>25</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

For many years, one of the most important tasks for the United States has been to counter the reintegration processes in the post-Soviet space under the leadership of Russia. The task of maximally weakening Russia’s positions in Central Asia has become even more significant for Washington in the context of the acute and deep crisis in relations between the “collective West” and the Russian Federation in 2021–2022, caused by the refusal of the United States and its allies to satisfy Russia’s legitimate claims to ensure its security.

The scale of US efforts in the Central Asian region as a whole, often coinciding with the efforts of American allies and partners in this area, is very significant. At the same time, in addition to US government agencies, numerous nongovernment organizations, and US private businesses, which have considerable financial resources, bear a very significant burden.

These efforts of the “collective West” run into deep and long-term mutual interests of the Central Asian countries, on the one hand, and the Russian Federa-

<sup>21</sup>Mendkovich, N. (2019) The US and anti-Chinese NGOs in Central Asia, IAC, November 5. <https://ia-centr.ru/experts/nikita-mendkovich/ssha-i-antikitayskie-npo-v-tsentrnoy-azii/>. Cited January 2, 2022.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Rodionov, D. (2021) How the West is rocking Kazakhstan and which NGOs will overthrow the government, LIFE, November 9. <https://life.ru/p/1448643?ysclid=13yei65tnw>. Cited January 2, 2022.

<sup>24</sup>United States strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025: Advancing sovereignty and economic prosperity (overview) (2022), U.S. Department of State, February 5. <https://www.state.gov/united-states-strategy-for-central%20asia-2019-2025-advancing-sovereignty-and-economic-prosperity/>. Cited May 21, 2022.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.



tion, on the other. An obstacle to the growth of US influence in Central Asia in the economic area is the growth of China's economic presence in this region.

Central Asia is an area of vital strategic interests for Russia, including the most important national security interests of our country. This set and continues to set the task of the most active opposition to the US foreign policy strategy in Central Asia in all three areas discussed above, using for this both bilateral and multilateral mechanisms of cooperation between Russia and the Central Asian countries. At the same time, it is necessary to consider the specifics of each of the Central Asian countries; their traditions; culture (including the role of Islam); the peculiarities of the political system; and the nature of their activities within the framework of the CSTO, the CIS, the EAEU, and the SCO.

In particular, more attention should be paid to the activities of government and nongovernment Russian organizations in the political, ideological, and humanitarian spheres with account for the specifics of the conditions of the intense information war being waged against the Russian Federation by the United States and its allies in the Central Asian direction.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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## Transregional Processes

# India–US Relations: The Current State and External Consequences

S. V. Uyanaev<sup>#</sup>

*Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia*

*e-mail: svuyav@yahoo.com*

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**Abstract**—Although historically India–US relations have been rather complicated, in recent years, they have been in a stage of noticeable active development. It is facilitated by mutual interests, based both on bilateral factors (trade, energy, and military–technical cooperation) and on circumstances predetermined by the global and regional situation. In turn, the significance of the dialogue between India and the United States is beyond the bilateral framework, affecting, in particular, the relations in the *US–India–China* virtual triangle and in the Russia–India–China dialogue format. Analyzing the totality of these issues is relevant in the context of the turbulence of the international situation, which has become greatly aggravated in 2022.

**Keywords:** United States, India, relations, interests, influence, Chinese factor, RIC format

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### INTRODUCTION

Relations between the Republic of India and the United States, if we mean their almost 75-year-long history, can be represented as a rather changeable line. For the most part, especially in the past century, it was sluggish and, according to the definition of the experts of the US Council on Foreign Relations, resembled “estrangement” [1]. There were individual bursts, which were demonstratively multidirectional. For example, in 1962, the United States was on the side of “nonaligned” India in the border war with China but did not support it in 1971 in the Third Indo–Pakistani War. New tensions arose after the Indian nuclear tests in 1998 and the American sanctions announced in this context.

### ASCENDING DYNAMICS

However, later this line in their relations slowly but consistently went up. Indeed, in the first decade of this century, the Prime Minister of India and the President of the United States held five summits, while in the previous 50 years there had been only three. In the 2010s, top-level contacts already acquired a distinctly regular character: from 2014 to 2020, N. Modi made six visits to the United States, and twice the head of the White House made official visits to India. In 2020–2021, Modi and President J. Biden held telephone conversations at least three times and participated in joint online events, including the virtual Quad summit in March 2021. Six months later in Washington, on the

sidelines of the first in-person meeting of the top leaders of the countries of this group, the first personal negotiations between the current leaders of the United States and India took place, culminating in the signing of another Joint Statement [2].

Formal moments are also a sign of ascending dynamics. Since February 2020, when Biden’s predecessor D. Trump visited the Indian capital, the relations between the two countries began to be called a “comprehensive global strategic partnership” [3]; thus, their official status, previously defined as “partnership for prosperity,” was raised. It is not by chance that after this visit, authoritative analysts of the *Foreign Affairs* magazine stated that Trump and Modi had managed to rebuild bilateral relations seriously, which have consistently been strengthened [Shivshankar Menon, 2020, p. 132]. In the updated Indo–Pacific Strategy of the United States, adopted on February 11, 2022, Washington calls New Delhi “a steadfast regional ally” [4].

From 2000 to 2019, bilateral trade increased ten times to a record \$146 billion. The United States is India’s main export market, the second largest source of direct investment (over \$13 billion in the 2020–2021 Indian financial year alone), and one of the main recipients of direct investments from India itself (their accumulated volume is \$22 billion) [5].

Such strengthening of ties is explained by a number of circumstances, of both bilateral and external nature, and at the same time relies on mutual interests [Kuzyk and Shaumyan, 2009].

<sup>#</sup> Sergei Vladimirovich Uyanaev, Cand. Sci. (Hist.), is a Deputy Director of the RAS Institute of Far Eastern Studies.

### MUTUAL INTERESTS: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASPECTS

Bilateral factors are trade and investment, including prospects for cooperation in the energy sector, including nuclear energy. For India, which has only an unofficial nuclear status, interaction with the United States means facilitating access to the markets of nuclear raw materials and technologies, makes it possible to mitigate restrictions from the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and generally consolidates India's position as a nuclear state. The United States, in turn, expects to facilitate its access to the Indian nuclear power plant market, the capacity of which is estimated at \$100 billion. India buys from the United States significant volumes of oil (10.7 million tons in 2020; from the Russian Federation, 2.6 million) and LNG (3.3 billion cubic meters in 2020; from the Russian Federation, 0.7 billion) [6].

The interests of the developing bilateral military–technical ties are also of a reciprocal nature, where the value of contracts for the supply of weapons from the United States by 2021 exceeded \$20 billion. The Americans receive large incomes, while India diversifies the sources of arms imports, which makes it possible to bargain with other suppliers.

However, equally important for the rapprochement of the two countries are *external factors*.

Each of the countries fears *China* in its own way: the United States proceeds from considerations of maintaining its global leadership and openly seeks to make India an ally in the confrontation with China, including by involving it in its own strategy on the Indo–Pacific region, put forward in 2017, with its dominance of military components. India is guided here by more complex considerations due to the long-standing territorial dispute between Delhi and Beijing: the two countries compete for regional influence, primarily in the Indian Ocean basin.

At the level of official contacts, Washington and New Delhi shy away from openly mentioning the “Chinese threat.” Most often, in joint Indian–American political statements, the attitude towards the “Chinese factor” is defined as the intention to promote common interests in the Indo–Pacific region and ensure regional stability and freedom of navigation. Often, especially in the context of the situation in the South China Sea, the parties declare universal calls to respect “the legitimate rights and interests of all nations according to international law” [7], which is perceived as a rather obvious signal to China.

In addition, India highly appreciates the position of the United States in support of its full-fledged membership in the UN Security Council, which has been consistently confirmed, including in joint documents of recent years.

The *Russian factor* cannot but influence the agenda of the dialogue between Washington and New Delhi. It is not by chance that India recently experienced

serious pressure from the United States in connection with the acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defense system. In April 2022, against the backdrop of the events in Ukraine, Washington warned India “of serious risks” associated with an increase in oil purchases from Russia [8]. Moreover, according to Director of the National Economic Council B. Deese, Washington directly told the Indian leadership that in the case of closer strategic cooperation with Moscow, the consequences would be serious and long term [Juster et al., 2022].

With all this, it is no secret that US–Indian ties are having a rebound effect on New Delhi's relations with Beijing and Moscow. Against the backdrop of Washington's increased pressure on China and Russia in recent years, the United States is rather concerned about the growth of these ties. In this respect, the dialogue between Washington and New Delhi has long been perceived by many experts as part of a much more complex quadrangular structure—the United States–India–China–Russia.

### PROSPECTS: THE CHINESE AND RUSSIAN FACTORS

What are the prospects for US relations with India in this context from the point of view of not only the bilateral agenda but, above all, the international one?

One can foresee that the general trends of recent years will continue in bilateral dialogue. The parties will cooperate in the areas in which their interests mentioned above, including the “Chinese factor,” are similar. However, limitations and zones of divergence, which are especially characteristic of New Delhi's approaches, will also remain. While interested in developing a strategic dialogue with the United States, India is clearly striving to preserve its traditional “strategic autonomy,” which it reinforces by diversifying its global and regional policies as much as possible. Note that, in recent years, New Delhi has seemed to be striving increasingly to expand such autonomy to the economic sphere, emphasizing its own strengths [Subramanian and Felman, 2022, pp. 144, 145]. Let us also bear in mind the frictions directly in the bilateral agenda, which sometimes, for example, in trade, turn into open squabbles. As *Foreign Affairs* observers have recently recalled, in 2019 the United States denied duty-free access to India's products to the American market, which it provides to developing countries; this move was motivated by the fact that India had not given the United States equal access to its market [9]. The issue has been discussed since then, but to no avail thus far. In addition, India is on the US list of countries where, according to the United States, human rights violations take place. In particular, Secretary of State A. Blinken spoke about this at the press conference on April 11, 2022, and the quick answer to him was the statement of the head of Indian diplomacy,

who recalled that India has its own idea of human rights [10].

There is no doubt that the degree of rapprochement between India and the United States, especially from New Delhi, will largely depend on the situation in *China–India relations*.

After resolution of the acute phase of the border conflict in the spring–summer 2020, on the one hand, tensions between Beijing and New Delhi remain, while on the other hand, negotiations continue on a further settlement (the 14th and 15th rounds of meetings were held in January–March at the level of commanders of the border corps of the two countries), and there are fairly stable mutual signals that the parties have not excluded the resumption of full-scale cooperation. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted at a press conference following the recent March session of the NPC, “... sustainable development, peace, and harmony between the two countries would serve as a guarantee of peace and prosperity on the planet.... May there always be a partnership of mutual benefit between us instead of rivalry” [11]. This seems to have enjoyed a moderate but positive response in India. Two weeks later, Wang Yi held talks in New Delhi with his Indian counterpart, who, assessing the meeting, noted the great significance of the bilateral ties and India’s interest in stable and predictable relations with China [12]. One way or another, trade between the two countries in 2021 reached a record level in the history of their relations—\$125.5 billion, having increased by 43% over the year [13].

This means that India is unlikely to show a greater inclination than before to cross anti-Chinese “red lines” in dialogue with Washington—both in bilateral dialogue with the United States and in the Quad, where, according to official New Delhi, India is emphasizing the economic agenda [14].

As for the mutual influence of the Indian–American dialogue and *Russian–Indian relations*, a certain balance should be expected here too. However, it is clear that the Ukrainian events in the spring of 2022 inserted new challenges into the situation in the United States–Russia–India triangle. Assessing the possible scenarios here, one should keep in mind the position of clear neutrality regarding Ukraine, which was immediately taken by India, just as in 2014, distancing itself from anti-Russian sanctions [15].

Indicatively, along with the diplomatic formulations of official New Delhi about its interest in relations with all countries, about the task of achieving peace as soon as possible, many in Indian media, including the blogosphere, clearly spoke for Russia as a proven, long-term, and reliable friend of India, which had supported it more than once [16]. On the contrary, doubts were expressed about the allied strength of the United States, which, using the example of Hussein, had more than once betrayed those

whom it called friends. Attention was also drawn to the mercenary nature of the US attitude to India: the United States, unlike Russia, is moving away, for example, from the transfer of defense technologies and seeking to put India in a dependent position.

President V.V. Putin’s visit to India in December 2021, including the holding of the first 2 + 2 Dialogue between the Foreign and Defense Ministers of India and Russia in New Delhi on December 6, 2021, was a success. Important issues in bilateral relations, including in the context of the new realities caused by the Ukrainian events and sanctions policy of the United States, were discussed during the negotiations, which were held in the Indian capital in late March–early April 2022 by Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov. They discussed ways to switch to the “ruble–rupee” scheme in bilateral trade operations, including settlements for India’s significantly increasing imports of Russian oil in 2022 and the already realized exports of a number of Indian goods to the Russian Federation. Other topics were also touched upon, connected with the possibilities of removing traditionally strong bilateral relations from the pressure of Western sanctions. For the same purposes, India, shortly after the start of the Ukrainian crisis, created a government interdepartmental group to study the impact of anti-Russian sanctions on the Indian economy and find solutions, including through mutual settlements in national currencies, with orientation to the Chinese yuan as the base exchange rate equivalent [18].

Note, however, that almost simultaneously with the Russian Foreign Minister, the Indian Prime Minister received British Foreign Minister L. Truss, and three weeks before that, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar had had a personal meeting in Melbourne with Blinken. In the interval between these events, Deputy Secretary of State V. Nuland visited the Indian capital and, as part of the next round of regular US–Indian consultations at the level of deputy foreign ministers, insisted on the increased need for cooperation between the two major democracies and on India’s refusal to import Russian weapons [19]. Recall that, since the beginning of the year, the Indian Prime Minister has held telephone or online negotiations with almost all the leaders of the leading Western countries (Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Australia, Canada, France), as well as Poland and Ukraine, and took part in the online Quad summit on March 3, 2022 [20]. On March 31, Indian Deputy Foreign Minister Harsh Shringla received US Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh to discuss Ukraine and developments in the Indo–Pacific region [21].

At the same time, despite the tightened agenda of negotiations with Washington, influential Indian experts stated that tension in relations between the United States and India had increased. Allegedly, this was caused by “Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s reluctance to criticize Putin, which has complicated

a budding security partnership between the democracies in countering China's influence." Citing the April 6 speech of the Indian Foreign Minister to his parliamentarians as the basis for such an assessment, commentators in *The Times of India* emphasized that, for India, Russia is an "important partner in a variety of areas"; based on this, it is "assessing the implications" of the Ukrainian events and "deciding what is best for our national interests" [24].

#### RUSSIA–INDIA–CHINA DIALOGUE FORMAT

In other words, India's parallel dialogue with Moscow and with the United States and other Western countries, including Quad members, can be considered one of the most likely scenarios for the near future. It seems much less likely that New Delhi's policy of "autonomy and equidistance" will abruptly change to a formal union with Washington, the possibility of which was recently analyzed by some researchers [Brahma Chellaney, 2020].

In fact, this was again indicated by the results of the regular online meeting of Biden and Modi on April 11, 2022, and the subsequent face-to-face talks between the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs (2 + 2 format), when the parties continued the dialogue on security and other areas of cooperation, but the Indian leaders again refrained from criticizing Russia in the Ukrainian context and avoided any commitment to reduce cooperation with the Russian Federation [25]. For similar reasons, and despite the current difficulties in Sino–Indian relations, the Russia–India–China (RIC) dialogue format remains relevant. This format was not too much affected by the Ukrainian events, which was facilitated by the fact that both India and China assessed it from similar, neutral, positions, refraining from criticizing and condemning Russia and fencing off anti-Russian sanctions. The RIC continues to be considered important in Moscow and Beijing. New Delhi shows no intention of leaving it either.

Recall that on November 21, 2021, the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, China, and India held a regular annual event—trilateral negotiations (held since 2002; the last two years, in an online format), culminating in the adoption of a joint communiqué [26]. The need to promote trilateral cooperation further was once again recorded in the Joint Russian Statement following the December (2021) visit of the President of the Russian Federation to India [27]. The same approach was confirmed during the above-mentioned talks of Lavrov in New Delhi in the spring of 2022. Let us note that, having arrived in the Indian capital from Beijing, where he had previously met with Minister Wang Yi, the head of Russian diplomacy, among other things, referred to a positive opinion about the prospects of the RIC, again expressed by the Chinese side [28].

India, let us repeat, quite routinely combines RIC-like formats with its participation in similar Western-oriented dialogue configurations (for example, in the US–India–Japan trio). Therefore, the likelihood of India curtailing its participation in the unification of the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization seems even lower than in the case of the RIC.

India today can once again use the benefits of the beneficiary, when, in connection with the events in Ukraine, its international position is important to both Russia and the West. The above-mentioned abundance of visits to the Indian capital by leaders of various countries is good evidence of this.

As some observers reasonably emphasize, the United States, not wanting to lose the "Indian resource" in its confrontation with China, refrains from quarreling with India because of its special position on Ukraine [29].

However, India's position is important for Russia as well. It was the opinion of India, according to the same experts, that was taken into account, for example, in the communiqué following the second Quad summit, which "failed to condemn Russia" [30].

Such a situation objectively promotes the interests of the Russian Federation, which means that in any case it requires a flexible and carefully adjusted policy of Russia in the Indian–American–Russian triangle.

At the same time, one should keep in mind the high degree of dynamics of the international landscape associated with the new Ukrainian crisis. Its consequences can make important adjustments to forecast scenarios.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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*Translated by B. Alekseev*



## Transregional Processes

# Crisis between Russia and Ukraine: The China Factor<sup>1</sup>

S. M. Trush\* (ORCID: 0000-0001-7275-001X)

*Institute for the US and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 121069 Russia*

*e-mail: zebra758@gmail.com*

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**Abstract**—China is not formally taking sides in the Russian–Ukrainian conflict; it keeps neutrality, but PRC is closely siding with the Russian explanation of its conflict with the West and NATO. China stresses its traditional adherence to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the national states meaning Ukraine indirectly. Moscow is seeking China’s support and backing diplomatically, economically and most important in militarily strategic sphere, aiming at securing of its Eastern flank in case of escalation between Russia and NATO on the West.

**Keywords:** Russia–Ukraine conflict, secondary economic sanctions, Taiwan problem, NATO enlargement

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### CHINA’S APPROACH TO CRISIS: BASIC POINTS

The basic points of the Chinese official reaction on the Ukrainian crisis, that were made public at the initial phase of the Russia’s special operation (February–April 2022) can be outlined in the following way.

1. China is formally not taking sides in this conflict, it keeps neutrality between Moscow and Kiev. Beijing calls for negotiations and diplomatic instruments to settle the conflict.

2. China stresses its traditional adherence to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the national states. Such Chinese stance could be viewed as a certain indirect criticism of Russia and its special military operation.

3. China is very closely or completely siding with Russia’s explanation of its motives for conflict with the West. Beijing shares Moscow’s view that Russian security interests were neglected by NATO. Several “phases” of the NATO enlargement took place in the past and there is a real possibility of Ukraine’s inclusion to NATO alliance in the future.

4. China opposes comprehensive economic sanctions against Russia, aimed at its isolation and blockade. China is not joining them, considering such economic blockade as the instrument of the cold war and unipolar domination.

5. China is ready to deliver humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Beijing initiated the special plan for such aid

and this plan has 6 points in it. China also signaled that it is ready to render economic support for Ukraine in postwar restoration.

6. China is actively playing the “Europe card” in this crisis, trying to weaken the alliance unity between the European members on the one hand, and the United States on the other. Beijing calls for Europeans to build separate and independent strategic relationship with Moscow with lesser coordination with the US interests. Such policy is not new to Chinese foreign strategy in the recent years. However, this Chinese approach was invigorated and received new stimuli during the period of Trump administration, when systemic confrontation between China and the United States has grown to its heights.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has the visible and multifaceted impact on China’s foreign policy. On the one hand, speaking pragmatically, from the “Realpolitik” perspective, as the result of the outburst of animosity between Russia and the West, due to the economic sanctions against Moscow, China’s influence and the capitalization of the “China card” has increased. On the other hand, Moscow is seeking for China’s support and solidarity in diplomatic, economical and, most importantly, in militarily – strategic sphere, since Russia is trying to secure its Eastern flank amidst escalation between Russia and NATO. Washington, for its part, thinking pragmatically—whatever belligerent Biden’s rhetoric against China sounds—is not excluding additional sensitivity and flexibility to China’s demands, trying to prevent China’s deeper cohesion with Moscow.

Both capitals—Moscow and Washington are ready “to pay their price” to China.

\* Sergei Mikhailovich Trush, Cand. Sci. (Hist.) is a Leading Researcher at the Institute for the US and Canadian Studies (ISKRAN).

<sup>1</sup> The article was translated by the author.

Moscow's "price" could possibly be the meaningful concessions and further steps, moving Russia to subordinate role in "strategic partnership" with China. Moscow could possibly be ready to strengthen its cooperation and support to Beijing in its competition with the United States at the Indo-Pacific theater, at the South China sea and even over Taiwan dispute. Russia's concessions could possibly pertain to Moscow's further acceptance of the growing China role in Central Asia, in Arctic zone, China's further penetration to the Russian internal market, attaining monopolistic position at pricing of Russian energy.

It also seems that Biden will be ready to walk his part of the road to prevent growing Chinese tilt to Moscow in Ukrainian crisis. Washington's possible concessions to China could be the softening of the US tariff pressure on Chinese export, partial easing of restrictions on certain high-tech items for China, the US less harsh approach in South China Sea dispute, freezing or downgrading activity in the newly born anti-China military formation with Australia and UK (AUKUS). Certain guarantees of the United States to Beijing in Taiwan independence issue, in easing tension at Taiwan strait—either openly or tacitly—could also be the possible options for compromise.

The deep split and contradictions in the US political elite notwithstanding, its anti-Moscow sentiments are very strong due to the Ukrainian crisis. Therefore, Washington and Beijing seem to be ready to compromise and bargaining on the Ukrainian issue.

At the same time, China itself is facing the serious negative implications of the Ukrainian crises. Those negative implications are visible for Beijing in his bilateral ties with Moscow, but mostly due to the rising risks for global security and challenges in global economy.

Three most negative factors for China are as follows.

1. The risk of global escalation of the Ukrainian conflict, involvement of new participants in it. Direct involvement of NATO countries in hot conflict, use of the nuclear weapons and triggering the Third world war are a real possibility. The old Chinese maxim about "the wise monkey sitting on the top of the hill and watching the tigers' fighting down below" stopped to be relevant for the nuclear age.

2. Western sanctions against Russia are seriously shattering global economy, affecting logistic and production chains, slowing down world consumption, triggering sharp rise of prices, first of all for energy and for food. China's main realms of competition for multipolarity with the United States are, at first hand, economy, trade, and technology realms, with the military might and capabilities being next to it. Given China's current 18% share of the world GDP, its GDP growth rate during last decade roughly around 6%, given China's approximately US \$6 trillion share of world trade, its ascending role in regional free trade

zones and cooperation formats, like ASEAN and RCEPP,<sup>1</sup> given China's actively boosting its "Belt and Road" geoeconomic project, Beijing is obviously anxious that all this assets and strong points of the PRC posture are put at risk as a result of the Ukrainian crisis. Such risks for China's plans and interests are most obvious in Western and Eastern Europe. This zone is of key importance and is very promising for Chinese economic priorities; China's options there are being very interlinked with Russia's policies.

3. From China's perspective, Russia is becoming a risky and unpredictable partner in "strategical partnership" that was shaped between the two during the last decade. It is true, that Moscow still remains China's most heavy weight "quasi-ally" in global competition and, most important for Beijing, in its relations with the United States. However, Moscow's unpredictable behavior started to evoke too much acute negative challenges for China. While maintaining and expanding its economic ties with Moscow, China is facing the danger of "secondary" Western sanctions in trade and banking. If such risks and pressures will continue, it is uncertain whether actions of Chinese banks and economic entities will meet Moscow's interests and needs. Beijing will be seriously considering its economic priorities and will hardly put at risk its many trillion trade volume with the world to please Moscow.

#### CHINA'S POSITION ON UKRAINE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS LONG TERM FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS: NUANCES AND DYNAMICS

Ukraine crisis has turned out to be one of the most grave crises since the second World War. Being so acute and systemic, this crisis affected the broad gamut of Chinese interests, pertaining to nuclear survivability, global security, global economy and trade, as well as China's bilateral ties with other countries and partners. Chinese diplomacy found itself facing the difficult task of harmonizing and adapting its foreign policy stance to the challenges, posed by the Russian special military operation.

The main contradiction and dilemma for China's diplomatic posture, the one it has to address and adapt to, is as follows. On the one hand, China has to demonstrate—more or less convincingly—its support to Russia, the latter being Beijing's main international partner and its "quasi-ally." On the other hand, China needs to avoid being fully binded to Moscow, to Russian decision to solve the conflict with Ukraine and NATO exclusively by military and coercive means.

<sup>1</sup> Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a free trade zone agreement including 15 countries of Asia and Pacific region: China, Japan, Australia, South Korea, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Phillipines, Cambodia, Singapore, Laos, Myanmar, Brunei, and New Zealand. Agreement was signed in 2020.

In the eyes of international community, it is vital for China not to share with Russia the responsibility to undertake the special military operation in Ukraine. Such sharing and solidarity would be suicidal for China's basic foreign policy interests. If China adhere to such position of solidarity, it would contradict in basics to China's current status as an alternative world pole, the one opposing to the United States. Such solidarity would contradict to China's image of the major world power, adhering to the "non-western" mode of development and growth, to the "non-hegemonic" policy, to the universal principles of preserving the sovereignty of all states, including those middle and small. Such factors and principles are extremely important to the diplomatic position of China in general, and for its competition with the United States specifically.

The way in which China is resolving this dilemma in Russian-Ukraine conflict, is typical to the traditional flexibility of Chinese diplomatic style. Thus China, on the one hand, is not voicing direct support and approval of the Russian special operation, demonstrating its neutrality and independence between Moscow and Kiev. On the other hand, Beijing, de-facto, is indirectly supporting Russia by expressing its understanding of Moscow's interpretation of the origins of this conflict.

The idea that the West and NATO are bearing the main responsibility for the ongoing conflict in Eastern Europe is growing in influence and becoming the main tune of China's narrative. On April 1, 2022 the official spokesman of the PRC Foreign Ministry Zhao Lijian stated: "As a product of the Cold War, NATO should have been disbanded after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, former US Secretary of State James Baker made his "not one inch eastward" assurance regarding NATO expansion to then President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev. As the culprit and the leading instigator of the Ukraine crisis, the United States has led NATO in pursuing five rounds of eastward expansion in the two decades or so since 1999. NATO's membership has increased from 16 to 30 countries and the organization moved over 1000 kilometers eastward to somewhere near Russia's borders, pushing the latter to the wall" [2].

One more delicate and important dilemma that China needed to "harmonize" in its diplomatic position on this conflict is the following. While voicing support to its Russian "strategic partner," Beijing at the same time should not jeopardize and endanger its basic geoeconomic priorities. China is striving to avoid the risk of blocking and discriminative Western sanctions to its economy. Such sanctions potentially could evoke rather strong and painful implications for Chinese interests. Negative effect of Western economic sanctions, in many ways could outweigh Russia's value in its capacity of a "strategic partner" and "stable

Northern flank" to Beijing. Such dilemma in Chinese diplomatic position Beijing is addressing by sharp criticism of the Western policy of sanctions. China depicts such policy as an instrument of US hegemony, "non-legitimate" and destabilizing factor of global economy.

Upon the evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, such anti-Western criticism is being actively elaborated in Chinese policies and the anti-sanctions tune is obviously on the rise. Addressing the economic forum in Davos two months after the start of the special operation in Ukraine, Xi Jinping stated: "Countries around the world are like passengers aboard the same ship who share the same destiny. For the ship to navigate the storm and sail toward a bright future, all passengers must pull together. The thought of throwing anyone overboard is simply not acceptable. In this day and age, the international community has evolved so much that it has become a sophisticated and integrated apparatus. Acts to remove any single part will cause serious problems to its operation." Chairman of the PRC further on specially stressed that "in today's world, unilateralism and excessive pursuit of self-interest are doomed to fail; so are the practices of decoupling, supply disruption, and maximum pressure; so are the attempts to forge "small circles" or to stoke conflict and confrontation along ideological lines" [3].

China's political line and positions taken at the United Nations is one of the central elements of Beijing's support to Russia in Ukrainian issue. While voting at the UN Security Council and other UN institutions and fora, China is voting against or neutrally (abstains from voting) on the resolutions, that are aimed at criticizing, sanctioning, or other restricting measures towards Russia. China's supportive voting at the UN is of high value to Russian leadership. Beijing's voting support on resolutions, concerning situations in the Ukrainian town of Bucha and other resolutions, accusing Russia in genocide of civilians, was especially important to Moscow.

Economic sanctions also became the central topic in polemics between China and the United States on the Ukrainian issue. It is obvious if one take into account the evolution of the US position. In March and April of 2022 Foreign Ministry of the PRC was engaged in aggressive polemics with the key figures of the US Administration—A. Blinken, J. Yellen, various US publicists [10–13].

In March of 2022 online negotiations between Xi Jinping and J. Biden took place and Russian-Ukrainian conflict was in focus of this talk. Judging by the American, as well as by the Chinese official information on these negotiations, the possibility of "restrictive" measures against China, in case the Chinese will move to more substantial support to Moscow in Ukrainian crisis, was discussed in substance during this talk [4, 5].

White House do not recognize that China is holding neutral position in the war between Russia and

Ukraine. In July 2022 the US Secretary of State A. Blinken, while summing up his talks with the PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi, expressed this view. Blinken pointed out, that China's support to Russia is most obvious in Chinese voting in the UN and also in Chinese media, the way this media is promoting Russian propagandistic narratives [14].

On the propagandistic “level,” Chinese reaction to the menace of the US sanctions is obvious and predictable—resolute rebuff and rejection. However, on the practical level Chinese reaction is more ambiguous [6, 7]. Chinese banks and economic entities could be affected as the result of the possible US “secondary” sanctions on the Ukrainian issue. Nowadays, in the period of contemporary “post-Trump” decay of economic ties between the US and PRC, situation for Chinese economic players grow even worse. As a possible result of new restrictive measures Chinese firms could be denied the full and comprehensive access to the US and European market, they could have further difficulties in obtaining credit in Western banks; stability of banking services for Chinese entities in the West could be jeopardized too. Chinese assets in US dollars and in US securities, other China assets, deposited in the United States or under US control, could be put under risk; technological exchange with the United States could be hampered even more.

Therefore, the approach of Chinese economic entities to the threat of the US sanctions is very sensitive and cautious. There are cases when the Chinese firms, without making it public, are refusing the Russian partners in certain requests and deals, if they are facing the real risk of the US “secondary” sanctions. Thus, for example, Russian main banks, by now, are unable to issue the cards of the Chinese payment system Union Pay, because the Chinese could face the risk of sanctions. Russian media and consulting agency RBK (Russian Business Consulting) made such facts public, referring to Russian entities Sberbank and Alfabank as its sources [8]. Also, Huawei brand application store, named App Gallery, stopped providing Russian customers certain application programs for the banks—VTB, Otkritie Bank, and Promsvyazbank. Those banks were put under sanction restrictions of the European Commission. Also, Huawei refused to provide the customers of Russian banking system Mir with online support services, according to the information from the Mir customers [9].

Russian—Ukrainian conflict together with comprehensive and systematic Western sanctions against Moscow inevitably had effect on Russian—Chinese trade, its commodity nomenclature and dynamics. During the period of March through May 2022 the expectations of growth of Russian import from China in reality hasn't come true. At the same period Russian export to China has grown, due to the growing prices for energy at global markets, with energy items being the key segment of Russian export commodity

list. The slowdown of Russian import from China, on the one hand, can be explained by the general slowdown of consumers demand and low insolvency of Russian customers. On the other hand, this slowdown took place due to the rising prices on Chinese domestic market together with growing transportation and logistics costs as the result of the military conflict in Europe. From January through March 2022 Chinese import from Russia amounted to \$41.3 billion; export growth rate, as compared to the same period of 2021 was +46.5%. Such growth rate is much higher than China's average world import growth (+6.6%). Russian export to China at the same period was \$24.6 billion, with the growth rate +7.2%, that is substantially lower than average growth of China's export to the world (+13.5%) [15]. In May 2022, to compare with April, the flow of Chinese export increased by 13.7%, showing certain adaptation to the new status-quo. At the same time, by the experts' view, the expected substitution of missing European export to Russia by goods from China, has not realized yet [16].

According to Russian Ambassador to China A. Denisov's viewpoint, China is ready to substitute Western exporters to Russia in high technologies, microelectronics and cars, but this process will take certain time [17].

One more topic of hot polemics between China and the United States in the context of the Russian—Ukrainian crisis is Taiwan. The United States obviously is making pressure on Beijing in this issue. Washington is trying to drive Beijing to conclusion, that the escalation of tension at the Taiwan strait in the context of current crisis in Eastern Europe is not in Chinese interests. Washington is not happy that China could pragmatically use escalation on Taiwan as the indirect support to Moscow, as an instrument of distracting Western attention and resources from Europe to the Asia—Pacific region. China, on its hand, is keeping his traditional line, stating that Taiwan issue is internal matter for the PRC. Beijing argues that Taiwan problem is principally different from the Russian—Ukrainian conflict, which is the conflict of two sovereign states [10].

During escalation of China—US tensions under Trump administration the same escalation was growing in the “little triangle” (Beijing—Washington—Taipei). This escalation was motivated and coming from both sides, Beijing and Washington, but mainly fueled by the US side. Growing military activities of the Chinese PLA at the Taiwan strait, rising pro-independence sentiments during the presidential election campaign in Taiwan, upgrading the level and growing dynamics of official contacts between the United States and Taipei—all these tendencies were moving the situation in the Taiwan strait to be more tense. The last of these tendencies is making Beijing especially nervous, since China considers it as an obvious retreat of the White House from the principal line of

the three fundamental Chinese–American communi-ques and the basic consensus on the “one-China” policy. In April 2022 Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the US Congress was planning to visit Taiwan. If such visit take place, it would be the highest ever US official visit to Taiwan since 1971. However this trip was cancelled at that time.

15 June 2022 Xi Jinping and V. Putin had a phone talk, their second talk since the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine. Xi Jinping stated that China, while assessing the Ukrainian crisis, take into consideration its historical complexity and multi-faceted origin. He also stated, that China is making its own independent conclusions, actively promoting global peace and striving for stable economic order all over the world [18]. Experts took notice on nuances in press-releases in China and Russia on this phone talk. Specifically, according to the Russian version, two leaders touched the questions of “further development of military and military-technological ties.” In the Chinese version of press-release such thesis is omitted. While assessing the situation over Ukraine, the Russian side stated, that “Chairman of the PRC pointed out legitimacy of Russia’s measures, taken to defend the core national interests against external threats to its security.” In the Chinese version such statement is missing [19].

China’s position on Russian–Ukrainian issue is being in the process of evolution, as well as the Russian–Ukrainian conflict itself. New nuances, turns and tendencies in this position are possible. Such evolution and dynamics reflect acute and comprehensive character of this conflict, unclear prospects for its resolution and implications for the international system. It also reflects a complicated gamut of Chinese foreign policy interests in the context of hot confrontation in Eastern Europe.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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## Transregional Processes

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# Formation of an Anti-Chinese Consensus among US “Think Tanks”: From D. Trump to J. Biden

D. A. Kochegurov<sup>#</sup>

*Arbatov Institute for US and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia*

*e-mail: kocheg.dima007@yandex.ru*

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**Abstract**—This article is dedicated to the factor of think tanks in the US foreign policy towards China. A rapid change in attitudes to China within the US political elite is recorded, which indirectly reflects the influence of think tanks on it. Based on the analysis of reports of leading think tanks, the evolution of their views on China is demonstrated. The main conclusion is that the think tanks support an anti-Chinese consensus, strengthened during the presidency of D. Trump, and advocate stricter measures against China. Overall, the American expert community sticks to the same approaches to China and gives approximately similar recommendations to the US government.

**Keywords:** foreign policy, United States, China, competition, consensus, world order, think tanks, restraint, confrontation

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### INTRODUCTION

There is every reason to believe that China has come to be perceived by American elites as a direct and primary threat to US national interests. The American political establishment has abandoned the premise that interaction with competitors and their inclusion in international institutions and global trade will inevitably turn them into bona fide players and reliable partners. The old paradigm has been replaced by a new consensus, backed by the presidential administration, both parties, the military establishment, think tanks, and the mainstream media, which suggests that China is a threat to the United States, that the US China policy has failed, and that Washington needs a new, tougher containment strategy for Beijing.

The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), which has become an expression of “principled realism” with an emphasis on national interests, declared China a revisionist force that seeks to supplant the United States in the Indo–Pacific region (IPR), impose its economic model on others, and change the regional order in its favor [1]. No previous NSS used such categorical, confrontational language to describe Beijing’s behavior in the world and towards the United States. The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) highlighted China as a strategic competitor and noted that, as China continues its economic growth, it will

develop a military modernization program aimed at asserting its hegemony in the IPR and achieving global dominance [2].

In the very first doctrinal document of the Biden administration, Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, published in March 2021, J. Biden admitted that the balance of power in the world had changed unfavorably for the United States, and the world simply cannot return to its previous state; therefore, the United States must develop a new course in its foreign and domestic policy [3]. As in the 2017 National Security Strategy, the return to great-power rivalry, which had acquired a strategic character, was stated. More assertively, China was hailed as the main geopolitical challenge to a stable and open international system, while issues of interaction and cooperation with it enjoyed little attention. The National Defense Strategy 2022 declares China the number one challenge, and its containment in the IPR, the main strategic priority [4].

In this respect, both the Trump administration’s doctrinal documents and the White House’s March document, which anticipated the imminent emergence of the National Security Council 2022, largely echo the reports of the leading American think tanks that influence the formation and implementation of Washington’s real foreign policy. Trump’s 2017 setting, adopted by Biden, that the main content of world politics was the resumption of geopolitical rivalry between great powers, among which China is the main threat to the United States, was borrowed, among

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<sup>#</sup> Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Kochegurov, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), is a Researcher at the US Foreign Policy Research Center, RAS Institute for US and Canadian Studies (ISKRAN).

other things, from the positions of foreign policy experts stated earlier, which requires close analysis.

### THE LEADING US THINK TANKS: COMPARING THEIR APPROACHES TO CHINA

Over a hundred years, a wide network of independent and nonpartisan organizations has developed in the United States, which are responsible for identifying and solving objective national problems, determined with account for the structure of the international system and its own domestic political situation. These organizations are defined as *think tanks* or *brain centers*, which have concentrated the scientific and intellectual potential of the United States. Leading think tanks have become an integral part of the US political system, including its foreign policy machinery. Think tanks, considering their influence, are ranked as the “fifth power.” Their main foreign policy function is to conduct research commissioned by government departments or congressional committees to revise policies in relation to a particular region or countries, or to reform a specific segment of the US foreign policy mechanism [Samuylov, 2013, p. 284].

A lot of fundamental scientific works by S.M. Samuylov, V.B. Supyan, and other scientists have been dedicated to the topic of think tanks. We will focus on the position of the leading American think tanks in relation to China, relying on their hierarchy in descending order in terms of their influence in the world. In ranking them, we proceed from the authoritative world ranking *2020 Global Go to Think Tank Index Report*, compiled by the University of Pennsylvania at the request of the UN [5]. An obligatory criterion for its formation is the participation of a think tank in applied analytics that has a significant impact on the ongoing state policy.

*The Brookings Institution* is a center–left think tank founded in 1916. In February 2020, Brookings Institution Vice President B. Jones noted that, even at the time of deep internal division in the United States, there is an elite and social consensus on China with account for “Beijing’s shift in strategy towards a more assertive posture towards the West” [6, p. 1]. China has abandoned its “peaceful rise” in favor of an assertive, nationalistic, and ideological approach focused on weakening the influence of the United States in the world, and therefore the US response, according to Jones, should be to strengthen alliances and protect the basic principles of the liberal world order with the mobilization of all available resources [6, p. 4]. Reproaching the Trump administration for “myopic underattention” to alliances and multilateralism, Jones emphasized that, for the first time in 200 years, an illiberal authoritarian regime was ready to play an important role in writing the rules of the world order; however, the Chinese model of development is unacceptable to the West, and therefore the world stands on

the threshold of a bifurcation of globalization and the emergence of two competitive zones [6, p. 6].

Other analysts also noted in February 2019 that the US–China relationship (especially trade and economic) had reached a breaking point. In their opinion, US concerns underlying bilateral tensions stem from specific practices inherent in the Chinese economic model; the American knowledge economy is under attack, including high-paying jobs and high value-added industries [7, p. 2]. China’s industrial policy, which distorts the rules of the game in its own favor, contradicts the market systems of most WTO member countries [7, p. 3]. Therefore, the US strategy, the institution’s analysts say, should include raising trading standards through new free trade zone agreements (FTAs), whose participants will benefit from them and “create economic costs to China,” which should encourage it to reform its economy. The outcome of the competition with China will ultimately be determined by the actions taken by the United States at home. In addition to increasing competitiveness, it is necessary to control access to technologies, as well as effectively use the tariffs agreed with the WTO, minimizing the damage to business [7, p. 5]. The progress that the United States already made with the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRRMA) of 2018 and the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA) was noted.

In November 2020, a fundamental work was released containing recommendations for the Biden administration on China [8]. Responding to the Chinese challenge will require the United States taking four important steps: strengthening the economy through reform and investment, engaging with allies to push China to open its economy and develop 21st century trade rules, strengthening the military presence in the region, and working with China on issues of common interest. The authors of the report acknowledged that the United States should abandon the idea of changing the Chinese political regime and preventing the rise of China through unilateral steps. It was recommended adapting to modern China and the challenges it poses to US interests and values. Trump’s unilateral approach was not a success in containing China. The United States, according to the authors of the report, needs to develop a new strategy that includes strengthening economic competitiveness, increasing confidence in US security commitments, and protecting American values. The United States is engaged in a long-term systemic competition with China. The military–industrial complex (MIC) will play an important but not central role in measuring progress in this rivalry. Rather, the outcome will depend on whose governance model is more attractive for improving the lives of citizens and solving the key problems facing the world [9].

*The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* is a center-left think tank founded in 1910.



Standing out among the works of the foundation devoted to the US–China rivalry are the reports of A. Tellis, an analyst and ideologist of the US–India rapprochement, compiled by him and his colleagues from the National Bureau of Asian Research. Back in January 2014, Tellis noted that the intensive development of China was the most serious geopolitical problem for the United States and that the challenge thrown out by China would be more serious than the challenge from the Soviet Union [10, p. 4].

In January 2020, a report was published in which Tellis explains that Trump only formulated what the two previous administrations had assumed as a likely scenario but were afraid to admit openly. However, Trump was late with taking a number of measures: the projection of might in Asia, the creation of the Indo–Pacific coalition, and the preservation of the technological dominance of the United States [11, p. 39]. The report questioned the effectiveness of tariffs as a means of reducing the negative balance of trade but supported their use as a tool for forcing China to remove trade barriers [11, p. 41]. The main thing is that Washington should adjust its policy that will allow it to compete more successfully [11, p. 43]. Thus, the United States needs to invest in itself while remaining a global source of innovation. In coordination with its allies, it should work on reforming the trading system. The time has come to sign new plurilateral free trade agreements that would bind the United States more closely to its partners and limit China’s access to advanced technologies. Finally, it is important to restore the ability of the United States to project power in the region. If the United States wants to maintain its primacy in the face of increasing competition from China, it should behave like a responsible power.

According to the foundation’s analysts, President Biden largely adheres to the policy of Trump. Two distinct elements of continuity show this. First, the Biden administration accepted as a reality the fact that China is a strategic competitor and rival of the United States. Second, his foreign economic team did not depart from the principles of mercantilism and protectionism in international trade and accelerated the Buy American and Hire American program [12, p. 34].

*The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)* is a center-right think tank founded in 1962. In January 2018, Chief Executive Officer of the center J. Hamre recorded that the ambivalence in US–China relations had come to an end. The most important element of Beijing’s “revanchism” and “nationalist” strategy is to change global rules and institutions in accordance with its interests and bypass the United States [13, p. VI]. More confident and assertive, China will not change course without external pressure, which will not materialize without American leadership [13, p. VII]. There is a consensus in the United States that China’s industrial policy is contrary to American interests. There is a consensus on the need

to take measures using export controls, trade duties, and restrictions on foreign investment [13, p. VIII]. According to Hamre, the optimal strategy should include three elements: targeted investments in infrastructure, research, and new technologies; their combination with regulatory instruments; and exerting pressure on China that would force it to change its behavior [13, p. XI].

In September 2019, a group of scientists established that the trade and economic conflict between the United States and China was likely to become a characteristic feature of bilateral relations for many years and could result in a partial separation of the two economies [14, p. 1]. Five recommendations were made: establishing a “dual credibility,” in which Washington must convince Beijing that it is ready to impose tariffs and bear the costs associated with this and at the same time meet its obligations if a mutually beneficial deal is reached; setting clear goals while assessing costs and benefits; improving the decision-making process; creating a multilateral coalition, when the mobilization of allies and partners can play on Beijing’s fear of isolation; and investing in its own economy as the basis of competitiveness on the world stage [14, p. 7].

In May 2020, the expert A. Cordesman also noted increased competition from China. He determined that, where possible, China will use its power, initiating a “war of influence” in ways that do not involve real hostilities. To combat this more effectively, the United States must rethink its military strategy and forces, with a focus on gray areas and hybrid conflicts. It should reorient itself to respond better to global challenges at the national and regional levels and to combine its military, political, and economic strategies [15, p. 3]. In January 2021, Cordesman repeated that it was necessary to make changes to the model of competition with China; if the United States wants to develop a more effective approach, it should look at it differently than just as an arms race [16, p. 2].

*The RAND Corporation* is a center-right think tank established within the US Air Force in 1948. A 2020 RAND report confirmed that the United States and China had entered an era of great power rivalry, part of which is not only military and economic confrontation but also the struggle of two ideologies [17]. In a situation when ideological differences reinforce the perception of threat, the states tend to perceive each other’s actions as more threatening. China, like Russia, has begun to form its own ideological project, challenging key aspects of the Western-centric world order. This is explained by the fact that as states become more powerful, their ideological ambitions tend to grow. Characteristics are a tendency to externalize internal forms of government and an attempt to reproduce oneself on the world stage.

In the June 2021 report, RAND Lead Analyst T. Heath emphasized that for the first time since con-

fronting the Soviet Union in the Cold War, the United States faced the prospect of long-term great power rivalry. Note that Russia was characterized as a “rogue state,” capable of inflicting irreparable damage but not seriously challenging the status of the United States as a global leader [18, p. 3].

In December 2021, a report was released containing the recommendations of the Biden administration regarding the containment of China. Among other things, it discussed the following: the accumulation of elements of US national power to achieve an international consensus on China; supply chain diversification; investment in the military–industrial complex; joining new trade alliances; dominance in cyberspace; combating unfair economic practices that give China an advantage; promotion of an attractive image of the United States; investment in countries most vulnerable to China; creating partnerships, coalitions, and mechanisms for cooperation in the field of security, alternative to China; and fight against Chinese propaganda [19].

*The Center for American Progress (CAP)* is a progressive think tank founded in 2003. In April 2019, its experts noted that the main geopolitical challenge of the 21st century would be how the United States and the rest of the world would respond to the rise of China. If the Chinese vision of the world order prevails and it becomes the dominant power, there is a risk that the world will become less free, prosperous, and secure. From their point of view, Trump’s approach to China had two fundamental shortcomings: in economic terms, it does not create conditions for effective US competition, and politically, the United States has abandoned the role of world leader, alienating potential allies and partners who share similar concerns about China instead of working with them. If the United States stays on its current course, it will lose ground to China. To reverse this negative momentum, the United States must invest in its unique strengths: in domestic policy, to address economic problems and invest in factors of economic prosperity and national security; on a global scale, to return to a multilateral approach, to build and lead a single anti-Chinese bloc. Subsequently, the United States will be able to implement a strategy that will limit China’s room for maneuvering, encourage China to realize its potential for the benefit of the global common good, and allow the United States to compete in the long term [20].

*The Heritage Foundation* is a conservative think tank founded in 1973. In February 2020, the foundation’s leading analysts produced a special report providing insight into the factors shaping China’s behavior on the world stage. The report included more than 50 recommendations to help address Beijing’s growing influence. It noted the foundation’s utmost respect for the Chinese people; the problem is not with it but with the “communist dictatorship” that threatens the well-being of peoples around the world. The analysts wel-

comed the attention of politicians to the full range of threats emanating from China and recognized the need to solve them [21].

The main conclusion reached in April 2020 by Director of the Foundation’s Center for Asian Studies W. Lohman and Vice President J. Carafano is that great power rivalry with China is a long-term challenge to American national interests that has no clear historical analogy [22]. Ten steps were proposed to answer it: investigating the origin of the coronavirus COVID-19, conclusion of new FTAs, military buildup in the IPR, preparing the US economy for long-term competition, prohibition of Huawei and ZTE to participate in the development of the 5G network, the weakening of Chinese influence in international organizations, coordination of actions on export control and investment regimes with the European Union, countering economic espionage and technology theft, support for Taiwan, and upholding American values.

In general, reading the foundation’s analysts produces the impression that their position on China is categorical. The United States–China relations are considered in the context of opposition to one another. The page for the China section explains that China’s rise is a constant and formidable challenge that the United States will have to face over the next few decades; even before the COVID-19 pandemic, China was an “irresponsible global actor” that threatened American interests and values [23]. It is worth mentioning some notes from recent reports:

—Extreme concern about China’s expansionist activity in the light of its conclusion of a defense agreement with the Solomon Islands, which was the culmination of China’s efforts to break through the island lines of the United States and its allies and enter the Pacific Ocean (B. Sadler, April 2022).

—Support for the increased role of the Congress, ready for a large-scale debate on China. The US–China Economic and Security Review Commission and the Congressional–Executive Commission on China are think tanks that have already submitted 14 Priorities for a Comprehensive China Bill and Seven Principles for a Congress–Led China Policy (W. Lohman, April 2021).

—Recognition of the fact that China’s actions are ideologically motivated. The revival of ideology as a factor will affect China’s foreign and defense policies. The current ideology, rooted in Marxism–Leninism, Maoism, Chinese history, and Xi Jinping’s ideas, is fundamentally incompatible with the US ideology, and therefore, from the CCP’s point of view, the United States is an existential ideological threat (D. Cheng and O. Enos, March 2021).

—A new perception of Japan with support for strengthening the US–Japan alliance amid Tokyo’s hesitation in terms of abandoning post-war restrictions and taking greater responsibility for its security (B. Klingner, September 2020).

—The evolution of the Taiwanese factor, the cornerstone of China's Indo-Pacific containment belt. The White House and Congress reached a consensus on strong support for Taiwan, and a bilateral FTA should be the next logical step in enhancing mutual trust and expanding economic engagement (A. Kim and W. Lohman, August 2020).

*The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)* is a centrist think tank founded in 1921. In January 2020, a report by CFR expert R. Blackwill was released, which stated that, even if partial normalization is achieved in US-China relations, each side of the conflict will continue to view the other as a strategic adversary. The two countries have different histories, different values and political cultures, vital national interests, long-term foreign policy goals, and visions of the domestic and international order; therefore, they are unlikely to achieve a sustainable and stable balance in the near future [24, p. 2]. The US efforts to integrate China into the liberal world order have created threats to American leadership, so the United States needs a new big strategy towards China [24, p. 9]. The lengthy report presented 22 prescriptions stemming from the understanding that maintaining the central role of the United States in shaping the global system remains a major goal in the 21st century. The United States needs the following: to revive the economy, to create new preferential trade agreements using instruments that could remove China from the equation, to restore the technology transfer control regime, to build up military infrastructure on the periphery of China, to strengthen the US armed forces for their effective and rapid projection on the territory of Asia and vital sea routes, and to promote American values in the world [24, p. 10].

Blackwill admitted that, under the Trump administration, US-China relations had entered the fourth phase, the phase of competition, replacing the postwar confrontation, the thaw in relations under R. Nixon, the inclusion of Beijing in the international system with the hope that it would become a "responsible actor" and accept the rules of the liberal world order [25, p. 16]. Blackwill criticizes previous administrations for the fact that, long before Trump, they constantly talked about a strategic partnership with China and used false approaches, misinterpreting its true intentions. While American leaders were making optimistic statements, China was implementing its grand strategy to undermine the US position in the APR. Blackwill puts this miscalculation among the main foreign policy mistakes made after the Second World War, along with the decisions of 1965 and 2003 [25, p. 9]. Trump started with the questionable decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), but since then a much clearer approach to China has been developed, breaking with many mistakes of the past, and therefore, in general, his presidency deserves high praise [25, p. 10].

In September 2019, with the participation of the cybersecurity expert A. Segal, a report was released stating that although Beijing's attempts to become a technological power contributed to global growth and prosperity, and the United States and China benefited from bilateral trade and investment, China's intellectual property theft and industrial policies posed a threat to the economic competitiveness and national security of the United States [26, p. 36]. China is implementing three industrial strategies: Guideline for the Promotion of the Development of the National Integrated Circuit Industry 2014, Made in China 2025, and Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, which aim to make Chinese firms produce 70% of chips, upgrade the aging manufacturing base, and compete with the United States in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) [26, p. 40]. In response, the United States needs to develop its own innovation security strategy.

*The Cato Institute* is a libertarian think tank founded in 1977. The Institute's reports show a strong and consistent commitment to libertarian principles. Its analysts recognize the increased role of the Chinese factor, but do not believe that China is such a serious threat as to justify the Trump administration's abandonment of the free market in favor of protectionism. For them, the economic rise of China is indisputable; however, in their opinion, the provision about the effectiveness of the state capitalism model contains two critical errors. First, state capitalism has not been the driving force behind China's past economic successes. On the contrary, these successes have been achieved thanks to Western investment and market reforms that China has been implementing since 1978. Second, China itself has faced systemic challenges that call into question whether it will stay on the same economic trajectory in the future [27].

Summing up the 50 years since the normalization of relations in 1972, the Institute's analysts note that China poses a more serious challenge to US hegemony than the Soviet Union, but despite the scale, it is important not to exaggerate the threat. It consists only in the fact that China seeks to reproduce the American Monroe Doctrine. What is at stake is US influence in Asia, which is an important interest but not an existential threat to America's future. In addition, the future of China is not fully defined either. Vulnerabilities include population aging, heavily indebted inefficient state-owned enterprises (China's public debt is almost 300%), the bubble in the real estate market, and huge gaps in income. In the international arena, China has few real friends, not to mention allies; therefore, Trump made the mistake of declaring economic war on everyone, including US allies, instead of uniting with them against China [28].

The experts also emphasize that the confrontational position of the Biden administration towards China on issues of both trade and security is nothing

more than a simplified version of Trump. The continuity of this policy is even more evident in the second case, especially with respect to Taiwan. The Biden administration continued the course and increased the US military presence in Taiwan. An ever-increasing role is played by the Congress, where a full bipartisan consensus has been reached. Legislative initiatives appear to reflect the intentions of both hawks and doves. A law is already being discussed that effectively gives the president *carte blanche* to defend Taiwan using US military forces without congressional approval [29].

*The Hudson Institute* is a conservative think tank founded in 1961. According to the analyst T. Duesterberg, the most important achievement of the Trump administration's trade policy was the recognition that China is not a responsible actor despite many hopes. The White House has also become convinced that WTO rules and mechanisms are of little help in solving the Chinese problem. Although the actions of Trump caused discontent among the supporters of open trade, a number of countries (Australia, Japan) followed the US example. Duesterberg suggested that Biden would also focus on the restoration of industry and increased internal stability. Among the priorities, the return of the United States to the TPP was recommended, as well as the conclusion of FTAs with Taiwan and Britain. A good institutional structure that could serve as a platform for strengthening the coordination of defense production with allies is the Five Eyes group [30, p. 2], since among its political leaders there is an understanding that the Chinese strategy *Made in China 2025* poses a serious threat to their competitiveness in high-tech sectors (especially AI) [31, p. 3]. In January 2022, Duesterberg outlined a number of acute problems hindering China's economic growth that it had failed to solve: population aging, growing inequality, and degradation of the natural environment; the priority of state corporations, where nepotism and incompetence flourish at the expense of economic efficiency; media restriction; and reckless real estate schemes that increase the risk of a financial bubble.

As for security, in anticipation of NDS 2022, where China was cited as the number one strategic rival and challenge, analysts found that the United States had done too little to contain China in the South China Sea. China threatens its neighbors, and the United States must end this with a comprehensive strategy. Conducting continuous naval exercises was named as one of the instruments of pressure that would demonstrate the determination of the United States to protect its allies [32]. It should be clear that dissatisfaction with the actions of China is due to the creation of artificial, alluvial islands in the disputed waters of the Spratly archipelago and the Paracel Islands, and the deployment of military facilities on their territory. In July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration

ruled that China had no grounds for territorial claims. China did not recognize this decision.

*The Hoover Institution* is a conservative think tank, founded in 1919, and now part of the Stanford University system. In November 2018, a report was published on Chinese influence in the United States. It was noted that China's turn to military–political rivalry with the United States has radically changed the nature of bilateral relations. For three and a half decades, China's behavior on the world stage has been determined by the principles of “reform and opening up” and “peaceful coexistence.” Chinese leaders sought to emphasize that rapid economic development and great power status should not threaten either the existing world order or the interests of Asian neighbors. However, when Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the situation changed. Under his leadership, Chinese politics acquired new features. It aims not only to redefine China's place in the world, but also to promote the development model of an alternative Western model of liberal democracy. China is taking an increasingly aggressive and expansive stance on the world stage, and bilateral relations are becoming more hostile. The main topic of the report was “China's interference in the internal affairs of the United States.” From the point of view of its authors, China intervenes ingeniously and decisively, which is why the economic and geostrategic losses of the United States have become increasingly significant, so the most effective defense is to strengthen democratic values and institutions [33].

In April 2022, a devastating article was published by the leading analyst of the Institute, L. Diamond. He moved away from the term *new cold war* but put it differently, noting that China is a neo-totalitarian superpower deeply hostile to democracy. China's ultimate goal is global hegemony with dominance not only in world trade and finance but also in areas such as the Arctic, outer space, and international institutions, although primarily Chinese party leaders are obsessed with maintaining their 70-year monopoly on power. The challenge posed by the CCP is fundamental to US national security and values. Diamond pointed out that the “Chinese demonstration of hard power” is becoming increasingly audacious and gave quite strong arguments in support of his position. The response of the United States and its allies requires “an equally tough policy of constructive vigilance” based on transparency, reciprocity, and strengthening of their own institutions [34].

The existence of bipartisan support for the anti-Chinese course was also confirmed by experts from another think tank affiliated with the university environment—the Belfer Center, founded in 1973 at Harvard University [35, p. 2]. From their perspective, Washington had too much faith in its ability to determine China's trajectory. China, on the other hand, was building up its power, increasing tension not only

with the United States but also with its neighbors. The result has led many politicians in Washington to conclude that long-term efforts to create a constructive relationship with China integrated into the international system now look more ambitious than realistic. The United States must strengthen and develop relations with allies and partners by offering them an attractive alternative to China's influence in the IPR. The intensive development of China represents the most serious geopolitical problem for the United States, and the challenge thrown by China will be more serious than the challenge from the Soviet Union.

#### PERCEPTION OF THE CHINESE THREAT INSIDE THE US POLITICAL ELITE

Speaking frankly, the topic of the Chinese threat to the unipolar world order led by the United States was raised more than once even before Trump's presidency. Under the Obama administration, Secretary of Defense E. Carter was very tough on China, noting that the United States and many other states are deeply concerned about some of the actions that China is taking, like the nontransparent defense budget, measures in cyberspace, and behavior in the South China and East China seas, which raise a number of serious questions [36]. The report of the US Senate Committee on Armed Services, published in May 2015, gave very harsh assessments of China's actions in the South China Sea as expansionist territorial claims that unilaterally change the status quo and increase tension in the region [37].

Yet a significant shift in US–China relations took place under the Trump administration, and what made it unique was the speed with which it happened. It is known that Trump criticized China even during the 2016 election campaign. Having become president, Trump ensured that the sluggish discussion in the United States about containing China moved into the phase of concrete actions based on interparty consensus. In March 2018, when Trump imposed the first duties on Chinese goods, a trade war began between the United States and China, which led to the signing of an agreement on the first phase of the settlement of the trade dispute on January 15, 2020. For the United States, it turned out to be beneficial, as it managed not only to gain greater access to the Chinese domestic market, but also to weaken the position of its main strategic competitor. In November 2018, at the G20 summit in Argentina, the USMCA agreement was signed, which fits into the strategy to strengthen the US position in its “inner courtyard” and form a single anti-Chinese trade and economic cluster. Congressional acceptance of the USMCA agreement by an overwhelming majority and bipartisan support for tougher trade policy against China are evidence that the anti-China consensus in the United States is rapidly strengthening.

A growing number of dignitaries have begun to speak of a growing consensus within the establishment that sees China not only as a strategic challenge to the United States but also as a country that has risen at the expense of the United States and cannot be stopped by the tools of the global liberal world order. Political scientist E. Kordesman singled out five key speeches by White House employees that testify to a new confrontational approach to China: the speech of National Security Adviser R. O'Brien on June 24, 2020, in Phoenix at the opening of the TSMC microelectronics factory; the speech by FBI Director C. Wray at the Hudson Institute on July 7, 2020; the speech by Attorney General W. Barr on July 17, 2020 at the Gerald Ford Presidential Museum in Michigan; and two speeches by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on July 23, 2020, at the Nixon Library in California and on July 13, 2020, at the State Department [38].

The arguments put forward by many influential voices in favor of the separation of the two countries have not gone anywhere. It will not be superfluous to give some excerpts. In October 2017, Secretary of State R. Tillerson said that the rules-based world order is increasingly under strain due to an authoritarian China that violates the sovereignty of other countries and whose provocative actions in the South China Sea directly defy international law and norms that are adhered to by the United States and other countries [39]. In October 2018, Vice President M. Pence made a very tough speech, emphasizing that China spends as much on its armed forces as the rest of Asia combined, and wants nothing less than to oust the United States from the Western Pacific [40]. In July 2020, Secretary of State M. Pompeo contrasted the “free world” with the “Marxist–Leninist regime” and shared the fears of R. Nixon, who considered that by opening the Chinese Communist Party to the world, he (Nixon) had created “Frankenstein.” Pompeo said, “Our policies—and those of other free nations—resurrected China's failing economy only to see Beijing bite the international hands that were feeding it” [41].

There is no reason to believe that bilateral relations have returned to the status quo after Trump's departure. Even during the 2020 summer debates, the main Democratic candidates (M. Bennett, P. Buttigieg, B. O'Rourke, T. Ryan, and E. Yang) showed a clearly confrontational approach to China. In September 2020, prominent neoconservative R. Kaplan noted that despite partisan polarization, both sides share deep concerns about China, and recalled that in February 2020 at the Munich Security Conference, House Speaker N. Pelosi noted, that they and Trump “have an agreement on the line of China.” According to Kaplan, unlike in previous years, China has few, if any, friends in the corridors of power in Washington. Even outside of Congress, there is a consensus emerging across the political spectrum about why China poses a threat to the United States and how to deal with it [42]. Thus, one gets the feeling that for the US political

elite, China is at the forefront of a neo-authoritarian challenge that threatens the idea of liberal democracy. Competition with the United States unfolds in ideological terms and becomes a zero-sum game, and therefore the United States simply cannot give up its leadership, otherwise China will take its place.

The downward spiral in US–China relations has taken public opinion with it. Although Democrats criticize Trump’s confrontational approach to China and oppose the separation of the two economies, they agree that the United States should take a harder line on China, according to an October 2020 Chicago Global Affairs Council poll. Thus, for the first time in two decades, the majority of Americans (55%), Republicans (67%), independents (53%), and Democrats (47%) perceived China as a serious threat; favorable attitudes of Americans towards China have fallen to the lowest level (32 out of 100) in the history of polls since 1978; for cooperation and interaction with China, 47% (65% in 2006), while for the containment of China, 49% (29% in 2006); 64% of Republicans for opposition to China, 60% of Democrats for cooperation; the majority are in favor of building strong relationships with traditional allies (South Korea and Japan), even if this worsens relations with China (77% compared to 58% in 2010) [43].

In October 2020, a policy article by H. Clinton was published on the website of the *Foreign Affairs* magazine published by CFR [44]. The fact that it was written by one of the leaders of the Democratic Party gave it a special resonance. The following should be noted. First, almost everything in it corresponded to the directions set by Trump. Second, the article did not say much about Russia, but a lot was said about China, which is a completely new kind of asymmetric threat to the United States. Clinton stated that the declining industrial potential of the United States and insufficient investment in R&D make the country dangerously dependent on China and unprepared for future crises, while China is doing everything possible to increase its advantage. Clinton acknowledged that the strategic landscape had changed and urged Americans to adapt to it with the combination of two agendas: military modernization and internal renewal with the restoration of the country’s industrial and technological power. The fact that China is a threat was also recognized by J. Biden, who spent many hours with Chinese leaders and realized who the United States was dealing with. In his article, he stated that China is playing the long game by expanding its global presence, promoting its own political model, and investing in future technologies, and therefore the United States needs to maintain a tough relationship with China; after all, if it achieves its goal, it will continue to rob the United States and American companies [45].

This is the essence of Biden’s position: China poses a threat to the United States, which must be responded to. As he repeated more than once after the inaugura-

tion, the United States is facing a challenge to its prosperity, security, and democratic values from the most serious competitor—China [46]. In his first address to Congress, Biden attacked China, promising to maintain the US military presence in the IPR and accelerate the country’s technological development. Biden urged legislators to pass a comprehensive bipartisan package of laws to put pressure on Beijing considering its human rights violations, to eliminate trade imbalances, and to increase US R&D funding to compete more effectively [47]. In March 2022, the Senate passed the American Competition Act [48]. The multibillion-dollar law aims to maintain US industrial and technological dominance; concerns changing the supply chain and R&D to minimize dependence on Chinese-made products. It addresses issues of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in China.

Against this backdrop, the Biden administration set about developing a comprehensive strategy for China, the general outlines of which can already be seen from the rhetoric and actions for 2021. The approach is based on the belief that China is moving in the wrong direction, but the possibilities to influence Beijing are limited, and so Washington needs to prepare for a long-term rivalry. In December 2021, in Jakarta, US Secretary of State E. Blinken presented the vision of a “free and open Indo–Pacific.” He noted that everyone in the region is concerned about “the aggressive actions of Beijing, which intends to turn the South China Sea into its own inland sea.” According to Blinken, this threatens the freedom of navigation and the movement of trade flows, so the United States will work with allies and partners to “protect the rule-based order” [49]. National Security Adviser J. Sullivan takes a softer rhetoric, arguing that the White House does not seek a fundamental transformation of the Chinese system and that the goal of US policy is to create conditions for the coexistence of two major powers in the international system.

In May 2022, Blinken delivered a speech outlining the White House’s approach to Beijing [50]. In accordance with it, the United States intends to protect and modernize the rules-based international order—a system of laws, agreements, principles, and institutions—that is undermined by China, declared the main long-term challenge to the international order. According to Blinken, the United States cannot rely on Beijing to change its policies to be more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad; it will rise to this challenge and advance its own vision of an open, inclusive international system.

It was clear from Blinken’s speech that Biden believes this decade will be pivotal, and, in order to succeed, his administration has developed a comprehensive three-pronged strategy: “invest, unite, compete.” The term *integrated deterrence* was also introduced to refer to a new approach based on the involvement of allies and partners; work in conventional,

nuclear, space, and information fields; and building on US strengths in economics, technology, and diplomacy. The challenge from China will be a great test for American diplomacy, and therefore Blinken declared his determination to provide the State Department with all the necessary resources as part of the modernization program, including the creation of a “China House”—an integrated department-wide team—that will coordinate and implement US policy by working with Congress. It can be noted that this was one of the best performances on China in recent years. It is clear that there is a growing understanding in Washington of the need for a more realistic approach to relations with Beijing, largely in line with the recommendations that think tanks have been preparing for many years.

### CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions suggest themselves. American think tanks play an important role in US policy making. Undoubtedly, one of the main trends of recent years is a fundamental change in their positions and approaches to China, which reflects a fundamental reassessment of how they understand the Chinese threat and recommend responding to it. Numerous reports indirectly confirm that a certain consensus on the issue of China has been formed among the think tanks of different ideological orientations. There was a shift in Beijing’s strategy to a more aggressive policy towards the West, aimed not only at redefining China’s place in the world but also at promoting the development model of an alternative Western model of liberal democracy. A telephone conversation between Biden and Xi in March 2022 confirmed concerns in this regard. As Biden said, the Chinese leader believes that an authoritarian regime is better in the new century since it does not require lengthy negotiations to develop the consensus needed in a liberal democratic system. Everyone unequivocally agrees on criticism of China’s inherent economic model. At the same time, several experts draw attention to the fact that China itself is facing systemic challenges that call into question whether it will stay on the same economic trajectory in the future.

For most analysts, the great power rivalry with China, which includes not only military and economic confrontation but also the struggle of two ideologies, is a long-term and historically unparalleled challenge to American national interests and values, to which the United States will have to adapt. It is recognized that China’s actions are ideologically motivated, and that the current Chinese ideology is fundamentally incompatible with American ideology; thus, the world is in a long-term strategic competition between the two systems, two models of the new world order. Almost all think tanks acknowledge that previous US administrations focused primarily on integrating China into the system based on the principles of the liberal world order, but this approach does not work.

US efforts to integrate China into its world order, with the hope that it will become a “responsible actor” and accept the rules of the world order, have turned out to be a failure and have created threats to American leadership; thus, Washington needs a new grand strategy towards Beijing.

It would not be superfluous to note that the contribution of the Trump administration, which played an important role in awakening the United States to the growing Chinese threat to its hegemony, is recognized, but there are also shortcomings characteristic of the previous foreign policy course: inattention to alliances and institutions (withdrawal from the TPP), refusal from multilateralism, and, most importantly, the absence of a new grand strategy. Grand strategy is a question raised by absolutely all think tanks that have managed to develop appropriate recommendations for US government agencies. Thus, it is noted that the United States must reinvest in its unique strengths: in domestic policy, to solve economic problems and invest in factors of economic prosperity and national security; on a global scale, to return to a multilateral approach, to build and lead a single anti-Chinese bloc. The main struggle for world leadership will unfold in the IPR, which is becoming the main theater of great-power rivalry, where the intensification of relations with Taiwan, whose growing factor is noted by everyone, is of particular relevance.

Finally, and most importantly, judging by the statements and actions of the last two administrations, Trump’s and Biden’s, it becomes clear that the approaches of think tanks to China and recommendations to the US government, set out in numerous reports, influenced the positions of American politicians. Due to ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans, there is some friction over methods of and approaches to containing China; on how the government should position the United States in the face of authoritarian, communist China. However, all are unanimous on the main point: China, not Russia, is the main foreign policy problem for the United States; the time has come to move to a tougher line and, accumulating its power, in parallel to prepare for a long-term strategic rivalry.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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## Hydrogen Energy: Legal Support and International Cooperation

A. V. Gabov<sup>a,\*</sup> and M. S. Lizikova<sup>a,\*\*,#</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Institute of State and Law, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

\*e-mail: gabov@igpran.ru

\*\*e-mail: lizikova\_m@mail.ru

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**Abstract**—The legal support and existing and potential contours and examples of international cooperation in the field of hydrogen energy are discussed. Based on study and analysis of international “hydrogen” initiatives and international organizations the activities of which partly extend to hydrogen, as well as interactions in the field of hydrogen energy within the framework of regional integration associations (BRICS, Eurasian Economic Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and the European Union) and individual regions, the authors note the lack of clearly defined strategies and plans, which does not contribute to the achievement of visible effects from cooperation, hinders the stability of international energy markets, and raises questions about the need to develop new rules at the international level, which should be enshrined in relevant international agreements in this area and on the creation of an international organization that would become a world center for cooperation in the field of hydrogen.

**Keywords:** hydrogen energy, hydrogen, renewable energy sources, energy transition, international cooperation, energy law

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### INTRODUCTION

Many factors influence the development of the energy industry both in Russia and around the world, which, ultimately, is reflected in various kinds of conceptual and strategic documents adopted by both individual states and their associations (unions) and international organizations. One of the factors that determine the vector of development and technologies in the energy sector, the economic nature of decisions, and legal decisions was the discussion of climate change, which resulted in decisions related to decarbonization. This agenda eventually became global; in connection with its discussion, a new energy transition was mentioned, the content of which should be the transition from traditional technologies for the production and use of energy and energy sources to renewable ones. It should be noted that the scientific literature does not limit the energy transition only to the indicated content; the energy transition is “a more complex and integrated phenomenon, involving an increase in energy efficiency, a reduction in the extraction of natural resources, and an extension of

the life cycles of basic materials (primarily due to the widespread introduction of the principles of a circular economy)” [Kodaneva, 2021].

Economic and legal decisions aimed at implementing the ideas of a new energy transition entail not only changes in the technologies used in the energy sector (which is, no doubt, positive in itself), but also create competition between traditional and new (carbon-neutral and low-carbon) energy sources and technologies, changes in the investment and energy policies of states and, accordingly, the geopolitical alignment of forces in the world, and at the same time give rise to new risks and challenges in the field of energy security: from the high financial and technological costs of energy decarbonization to serious socioeconomic and political shocks [Borovsky, 2021]. Moreover, ideas are being expressed about a “new understanding of energy security” [Farah, 2020], the hallmarks of which are a shift in priorities from ensuring supply to strengthening diversification; counteracting the negative impact of energy consumption on the environment; incorporating sustainability into energy and policy at both the national and international levels; and developing new strategies that provide a balance of sustainable, secure energy and economic development.

Part of the new agenda was the use of hydrogen and the development of hydrogen energy, as well as hydro-

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<sup>#</sup> RAS Corresponding Member Andrei Vladimirovich Gabov, Dr. Sci. (Law) is Acting Head of the Sector of Civil and Business Law, Institute of State and Law, Russian Academy of Sciences. Marina Sergeevna Lizikova, Cand. Sci. (Law) is a Senior Researcher, Sector of Civil and Business Law, Institute of State and Law, Russian Academy of Sciences.

gen technologies. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the development of hydrogen energy is designed to help create a sustainable energy system and achieve zero emissions targets by 2050 [IEA, 2021]. However, to implement the corresponding scenarios (forecasts), it is obviously necessary to develop international cooperation in the field of hydrogen energy. In conditions when many states have already adopted national strategies for the development of hydrogen energy and in order to build an international hydrogen economy that would take into account the balance of interests of the new industry and national energy security, it seems appropriate to implement a consistent coordinated policy in this area and apply joint efforts aimed at creation of mechanisms for international legal regulation, especially in terms of ensuring security and developing a system of international standards and certification [Lizikova, 2021]. At the same time, in order to determine and set priorities in international cooperation in the field of hydrogen energy, both at this stage and in the future, a clear agreed vision of the role of hydrogen in the global energy system in 2030, 2040, and 2050 is necessary in accordance with the Paris climate agreement, which would be the basis for combining national strategies into global and regional roadmaps [Van de Graaf et al., 2020] and, ultimately, would help to minimize the risks of gaps in strategies (and, accordingly, their elimination), as well as the risks of not meeting the set goals.

The IEA roadmap [IEA, 2015], developed to identify the most important actions required in the short and long term for the successful development and implementation of hydrogen technologies in support of global goals in the field of energy and climate and an IAEA roadmap<sup>1</sup> informing about the commercial deployment of hydrogen production using nuclear energy can serve as tools to assess, plan, and develop state hydrogen projects. The former, which plays a key role among the priority areas of international cooperation for the development of hydrogen technologies, indicates the need to spread knowledge about hydrogen technologies between developed and developing regions, the possibility of attracting developing countries to activities aimed at deploying clean energy technologies, the autonomous implementation of innovations in the field of clean energy.

Before proceeding to the consideration of existing and potential contours and examples of international cooperation in the field of hydrogen energy, it is necessary to raise the issue of approaches to the classification of hydrogen, since for the effective development of international cooperation and the formation of legal regulation of legal relations in this area, a common understanding of the various types of hydrogen is necessary.

<sup>1</sup> IAEA to create roadmap for nuclear hydrogen deployment. <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/IAEA-to-create-roadmap-for-nuclear-hydrogen-deploy>.

## HYDROGEN CLASSIFICATION

Even though hydrogen is the most common element in the universe, it is practically never found in nature in its pure form but is isolated from other compounds. Hydrogen production methods (steam reforming of methane and natural gas, coal gasification, water electrolysis, pyrolysis, partial oxidation, biotechnologies) and the resulting carbon footprint (from the complete absence of CO<sub>2</sub> to the release of carbon dioxide in the same volumes as during the combustion of natural gas) – used as criteria in the classification of hydrogen by color. So, within the framework of this approach, green, yellow, turquoise, gray, blue and brown hydrogen are distinguished, where the first is the most environmentally friendly, and the last is the most unecological. The advantages and disadvantages of one or another type of hydrogen are in the focus of attention of representatives of the scientific community. Thus, the prospects for green hydrogen are noted by [Noussan et al., 2021; Kakoulakia et al., 2021], [Howarth, Jakobson, 2021] compare green and gray hydrogen from a conditional position of economic feasibility, and [Park etc., 2022] and [Alfradique etc., 2022] note that the use of blue hydrogen is difficult to justify in terms of climate.

Although widely used, this classification has drawbacks. The development of promising technologies for producing hydrogen, as noted by A. Ishkov, will lead to a multiple increase in the number of emitted hydrogen species, therefore he considers the carbon footprint classification to be more scientific. According to another argument, the classification “by color” has political meanings, and the European Union uses it mainly to achieve the goals of decarbonization [Janusz, 2021]. At the same time, the EU in the hydrogen strategy adheres to a different classification of hydrogen, subdividing it into renewable and low-carbon.

It should be noted that only 5% of the total volume of hydrogen produced can be considered a commercial product. At the present stage, there is not enough capacity to produce low-carbon hydrogen. The rate of formation of the world hydrogen market is due to both economic factors and technical difficulties in ensuring its storage, use and transportation. The technical possibilities of hydrogen transportation, the potential environmental hazard of a few derivative products, the efficiency of hydrogen use in energy-intensive industries, and other issues are the subject of independent scientific research and discussions that are beyond the scope of this article.

## INTERNATIONAL “HYDROGEN” INITIATIVES

There are currently several hydrogen initiatives at the international level [Barbir, 2009; De Valladares and Jensen, 2011]. Thus, the International Association

for Hydrogen Energy (IAHE) and the IEA Cooperation Program in the field of hydrogen technologies (Hydrogen TCP/IEA Hydrogen) have been operating since the late 1970s, carrying out research, education, and information exchange between member countries.

The Hydrogen Council, a global initiative of leading companies<sup>2</sup> representing the entire hydrogen value chain, is focused on ensuring reliable and safe international trade in hydrogen. The International Hydrogen Fuel Cell Association (IHFCFA) is positioning itself as a bridge and link for integrating resources across the entire hydrogen fuel cell manufacturing chain to address jointly the challenges facing the industry during its commercialization and creating a market environment. The International Partnership for Hydrogen and Fuel Cells in the Economy (IPHE) aims to facilitate and accelerate the transition to clean and efficient energy and mobility systems using hydrogen and fuel cell technologies in all applications and sectors by disseminating information about the benefits and challenges of adopting widespread commercial hydrogen and fuel cell technologies in the economy.

The goal of the Mission Innovation Innovation Challenge 8 (MI IC8) “Renewable and Clean Hydrogen” is to accelerate the development of the global hydrogen market by identifying and overcoming key technological barriers to gigawatt-scale production, distribution, storage, and use of hydrogen. The Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM) initiative is a high-level global forum to promote policies and programs and clean energy technologies, share best practices, and encourage the transition to a global clean energy economy. In turn, the Global Hydrogen Partnership of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has launched a global program to promote the use of green hydrogen in industry. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) also contributes to the development of the global hydrogen energy industry, the role of which will only increase with the development of international hydrogen trade.

Other international organizations also contribute to the development of hydrogen energy. For example, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) has experience in the field of renewable energy and green hydrogen; the International Energy Agency (IEA) approaches hydrogen issues from the point of view of energy security; the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) provides information on the production of nuclear hydrogen; the International Energy Forum provides a platform for dialogue between energy sellers and buyers; and the Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organization (GEIDCO) is developing the use of new hydrogen energy storage and transfer technolo-

<sup>2</sup> Currently, this organization includes 134 companies from around the world.

gies in a number of areas of development of global energy systems [Filimonov et al., 2021].

The effectiveness of the above initiatives will largely depend on the coordination of their activities aimed at avoiding duplication, as well as at the synergy of cooperation at the global and regional levels [IEA, 2021], which will strengthen the necessary connections between stakeholders and position of a particular region in a future low-carbon hydrogen landscape.

For example, the International Renewable Energy Agency and the Mission Innovation are developing a collaborative process to strengthen global renewable energy innovation efforts and accelerate innovation through more effective policies and greater cross-border cooperation. There is a clear synergy between the goals of these organizations: first, both have a common goal—to accelerate the development of solutions in the field of renewable energy sources; second, 20 of the 23 members of the Mission Innovation are also members of IRENA; and third, both play a decisive role in accelerating progress. As follows from the Letter of Intent on cooperation between the International Renewable Energy Agency and the Mission Innovation,<sup>3</sup> this interaction gives IRENA a unique unifying force, broad perspective, and understanding of the progress and challenges of the energy transition, while the experience, insights, networking, and organizational capabilities and data IRENA has accumulated can help the Mission Innovation meet its goal of accelerating clean energy innovation.

In turn, recognizing that energy innovation is critical to advancing the clean energy transition, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, improving energy security, expanding energy access, and boosting economic growth brings the International Energy Agency and the Mission Innovation together. Mutually beneficial opportunities for expanding cooperation between them in areas such as

- improving data collection and reporting on public and private investment in clean energy research, development, and demonstration;

- sharing data on economic and technical improvements in clean energy technologies, identifying key long-term technological innovation gaps across sectors and technologies, and identifying measures to further scale up technology development and deployment;

- joint identification of countries interested in receiving additional support in this regard, to support them in achieving policy goals related to innovation efforts by the IEA, as well as adapting innovative ideas to the context of a particular country, are determined by the fact that the former continues to develop part-

<sup>3</sup> Letter of Intent on Collaboration between the International Renewable Energy Agency and Mission Innovation. Malmö, Sweden, May 23, 2018. <http://mission-innovation.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/IRENA-and-MI-letter-of-intent.pdf>. Cited August 11, 2022.

nerships with key emerging economies from around the world, and the latter goes on working closely with the private sector.<sup>4</sup>

Public–private collaboration is critical to the acceleration of deep decarbonization, with clean hydrogen as the key, while ensuring the necessary flexibility and resilience of energy systems. Its strengthening is intended to be facilitated by cooperation between the International Renewable Energy Agency and the Hydrogen Council.<sup>5</sup>

With support by the International Energy Agency and the Ministerial Hydrogen Clean Energy Initiative, which promotes policies, programs, and projects that accelerate the commercialization and deployment of hydrogen fuels and technologies in all aspects of the economy, together with the International Partnership for Hydrogen and Fuel Cells in the Economy and the Mission Innovation, the ways how hydrogen can contribute to building a cleaner energy system by promoting resilience, fail safety, and energy security are highlighted.<sup>6</sup> The key areas of their collaboration are helping to ensure the successful introduction of hydrogen in current industrial applications, safeguarding the deployment of hydrogen technologies in transport, and studying the role of hydrogen in meeting the energy needs of the population. This work resulted in a report of global hydrogen targets by 70 national governments, published in May 2022.

### LATIN AMERICA

According to the IEA [IEA, 2021], a significant role in the international quest for low-carbon hydrogen as an essential element of a global zero-emissions future is assigned to Latin America, a region that is one of the world's leaders in the use of renewable energy, which has a long-term potential for the production of large volumes of competitive low-carbon hydrogen and its export to other world markets. It is significant that, while in 2019 there were only three pilot projects to produce such hydrogen, at present, out of 25 hydrogen projects being developed in this region, several are gigawatt-scale projects aimed at exporting outside the region. The clue to their successful implementation, as well as the deployment of the production and use of hydrogen and the creation of a new industrial sector to produce high-tech equipment, is international dialogue and coordination, which are designed to ensure the strengthening of the necessary

<sup>4</sup> Letter of intent on cooperation between Mission Innovation and the International Energy Agency, Malmö, Sweden, May 22, 2018. <http://mission-innovation.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/6.1.16-IEA-and-MI-letter-of-intent.pdf>. Cited August 11, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> IRENA and Hydrogen Council forge alliance to scale up hydrogen across the energy system. <https://hydrogencouncil.com/en/irena-and-hydrogen-council-forge-alliance-to-scale-up-hydrogen-across-the-energy-system/>. Cited August 11, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cleanenergyministerial.org/initiatives-campaigns/hydrogen-initiative/>. Cited August 11, 2022.

links between stakeholders and market participants, provide an opportunity to position the region in the future low-carbon hydrogen landscape, and could also help shape future hydrogen markets.

Currently, the states of Latin America are participants in several international initiatives. In turn, the Regional Hydrogen Dialogue, which focuses on common challenges and potential that can help optimize the use of public resources to develop solutions to regional energy problems and ultimately identify future regional trade opportunities, is carried out as part of clean energy technologies: the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Regional Energy Integration Commission (CIER) for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE), and the ambitious Renewable Energy Initiative for Latin America and the Caribbean (RELAC).

The latest, announced on December 10, 2019, during the UN COP25 conference, united 11 countries in the region in a commitment to achieve a 70% renewable energy target by 2030 and more than double the European Union's target. It has received information and financial support from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE), the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the Global Partnership for Low Emission Development Strategies (LEDS GP), NDC Partnership, and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

The region's potential for the export of hydrogen and products of its processing requires the establishment of a dialogue with potential importers. The development of promising areas for regional cooperation among Latin American countries, such as the decarbonization of freight transport through a combination of sustainable mobility technologies, could support pilot projects within a network that provides regional exports through the ports of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, thus contributing to the formation of another “hydrogen bridge,”<sup>7</sup> connecting Latin America with Europe.

The Chile–Germany Green Hydrogen Promotion Agreement (dated June 29, 2021),<sup>8</sup> aimed at support-

<sup>7</sup> In the context of the development of hydrogen energy, the emergence of new energy superpowers is predicted [Borisov, 2022], which are technological leaders in the production and development of equipment for new energy, as well as the transformation of existing and the emergence of new trade and geopolitical alliances. As examples of such, along with the forecast of the transformation of the Middle East and North African states into exporting states and the loss of the dominant position of the current exporting states and their associations, the emerging “hydrogen bridges” North Africa–Europe and Japan–Australia are most often cited. This list can be continued.

<sup>8</sup> Chile and Germany sign agreement for the promotion of green hydrogen. <https://www.energypartnership.cl/newsroom/chile-and-germany-sign-green-hydrogen-agreement/>.

ing electrolysis projects abroad and creating a new commercial route for importing green hydrogen, and the Joint Statement by the Governments of Chile and the Netherlands on Low-Carbon Hydrogen Trade (July 2021),<sup>9</sup> as well as discussion processes for mutual cooperation in the field of green hydrogen between Germany and Brazil<sup>10</sup> and between Russia and Brazil<sup>11</sup> can be seen as the first steps in this direction.

Examples of other areas of cooperation regarding the development of a sustainable and affordable hydrogen supply chain, including the production of hydrogen from renewable sources, are the Argentine–Japanese<sup>12</sup> and Brazilian–American<sup>13</sup> cooperation.

## BRICS

An important role in ensuring global sustainable development in terms of universal access to inexpensive, reliable, and sustainable energy sources is played not only by individual states and regions but also by integration associations of countries. Since almost all the growth in global energy demand comes from fast-growing developing economies, which also lead in terms of greenhouse gas emissions [Kovalev and Porshneva, 2021], it would be fair to assign the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) a special place in this process.

Since 2014, issues of energy cooperation have been consistently included in the BRICS agenda. However, only in October 2020 was the first comprehensive document adopted, which fixed the agreed plans for the development of the energy dialogue between the member countries of this association [Sinchuk, 2022],

<sup>9</sup> Joint statement of Chile and The Netherlands on collaboration in the field of green hydrogen import and export. <https://www.government.nl/documents/diplomatic-statements/2021/07/01/joint-statement-of-chile-and-the-netherlands-on-collaboration-in-the-field-of-green-hydrogen-import-and-export>.

<sup>10</sup> German–Brazilian cooperation on green hydrogen. <https://www.german-energy-solutions.de/GES/Redaktion/EN/News/2022/20220525-h2-cooperation-brazil.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Joint Statement by President of the Federative Republic of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro and President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/joint-statement-by-president-of-the-federative-republic-of-brazil-jair-bolsonaro-and-president-of-the-russian-federation-vladimir-putin>.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum of Cooperation on Hydrogen between the Government Secretariat of Energy of the Ministry of the Treasury of the Argentine Republic and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry of Japan. [https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:2-D3XOhTViAJ:https://tratados.cancilleria.gob.ar/tratado\\_archivo.php%3Ftratados\\_id%3DkqWllps%3D%26tipo%3Dkg%3D%3D%26id%3Dkp6pmZY%3D%26caso%3Dpdf+&cd=1&hl=ru&ct=clnk&gl=ru&client=safari](https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:2-D3XOhTViAJ:https://tratados.cancilleria.gob.ar/tratado_archivo.php%3Ftratados_id%3DkqWllps%3D%26tipo%3Dkg%3D%3D%26id%3Dkp6pmZY%3D%26caso%3Dpdf+&cd=1&hl=ru&ct=clnk&gl=ru&client=safari).

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum of Understanding Between the Department of Energy of the United States of America and the Ministry of Mines and Energy of the Federative Republic of Brazil for the Establishment of a Mechanism for Consultations on Energy Cooperation. [https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2014/03/f12/brazil\\_us\\_mou\\_statement.pdf](https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2014/03/f12/brazil_us_mou_statement.pdf).

which does not contain any legal obligations, but supplements the existing agreements between the parties—the Roadmap of energy cooperation until 2025.<sup>14</sup> It envisages the following stages of energy research within the BRICS Cooperation Platform: identifying the most promising new technologies and developing mechanisms for cooperation; pinpointing needs and challenges in the field of energy security and energy development, as well as ways to increase the role of the BRICS countries in the global energy agenda; and reaching agreements on specific areas and forms of cooperation to promote the development of national energy systems and energy transition.

The roadmap includes renewable energy sources as part of sectoral cooperation. It is noted that the BRICS countries can benefit from the exchange of best practices and advanced renewable energy technologies, as well as joint analysis of the problems associated with the rapid increase in the share of renewable energy in the energy mix and the expansion of distributed generation.

Adopted at the XII BRICS Summit (Moscow, Russia) in November 2020, the Moscow Declaration<sup>15</sup> welcomed the approval of the roadmap and the start of practical cooperation within the BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform (ERCP) and also stressed the importance of international dialogue to advance the interests of the BRICS countries on a global scale by strengthening the strategic partnership.

In turn, adopted in September 2021 as part of the XIII BRICS Summit (New Delhi, India),<sup>16</sup> the declaration, noting the prospects of hydrogen for the energy transition of each country, the creation of reliable energy systems, and the strengthening of energy security, expanded the range of priority areas for energy cooperation.

A significant event in 2021 in this area was the holding of the Summit on Green Hydrogen Initiatives<sup>17</sup> with the participation of the BRICS countries, during which options for funding new green hydrogen technologies and the institutional support needed to create an ecosystem for the technology to flourish in order to better understand the hydrogen landscape from the BRICS perspective were discussed. The outcome of the summit was the conclusion that green hydrogen has always been a strategically important

<sup>14</sup> Roadmap for BRICS Energy Cooperation up to 2025. <https://brics-russia2020.ru/images/85/29/852976.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> XII BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration. <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/xii-brics-summit-moscow-declaration>.

<sup>16</sup> XIII BRICS Summit New Delhi Declaration. <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/xiii-brics-summit-new-delhi-declaration>.

<sup>17</sup> India to hold 2-day BRICS meet on Green Hydrogen initiatives. [https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/india-to-hold-2-day-brics-meet-on-green-hydrogen-initiatives-121062000452\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/india-to-hold-2-day-brics-meet-on-green-hydrogen-initiatives-121062000452_1.html).

area on the agenda of the BRICS countries. The expediency of adopting a common international standard for the safety of transporting and storing large volumes of hydrogen and the availability of an appropriate certificate of origin was also noted.

In addition, the preparation of a draft BRICS Energy Research Directory,<sup>18</sup> a document that plays a key role in the development of research cooperation in the field of low-carbon technologies between the member countries, as well as between academic and government circles, should also be noted.

Further promotion of cooperation in the field of “green” development was announced by China, which accepted the BRICS chairmanship for 2022 as one of the vectors for creating an accelerated BRICS path for global development [Wang, 2022]. However, the Beijing Declaration of the XIV BRICS Summit, adopted on June 23, 2022,<sup>19</sup> did not touch directly upon the development of hydrogen energy, emphasizing the fundamental role of energy security in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and welcoming the achievements of the association in the energy sector. According to the document, cooperation in the BRICS Plus format will give a new impetus to strengthening international cooperation and solidarity in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. During the summit, Iran and Argentina announced their intention to join the BRICS countries, which are actively promoting hydrogen energy.

Bilateral cooperation between the BRICS countries in the field of hydrogen energy is also being developed both within the association and with third countries. Thus, the Joint Statement following the XXI Russian–Indian Summit “Russia–India: Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Prosperity,” made on December 6, 2021,<sup>20</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia and the Ministry of Commerce of the PRC on the issue of deepening investment cooperation in the field of sustainable (green) development, signed at the Russia–China Summit in Beijing on February 4, 2022,<sup>21</sup> aimed at encouraging collaboration and investment in hydrogen energy projects and technologies are examples of the former, while the India–Germany partnership in the field of green hydrogen and

sustainable development and the India–Denmark green partnership are examples of the latter.

Thus, despite the fact that the BRICS in the energy sector are characterized by a bilateral format of cooperation [Mastepanov, 2016], we should note the trend towards the intensification of multilateral cooperation—the adoption of the first multilateral act in the field of energy, the holding of summits on a regular basis, and the expanding agenda—which, in turn, is in the interests of the development of hydrogen energy both within the association as a whole and between its member states. After all, the “pioneers” will have an advantage in the energy transition, because governments and associations that develop innovative policies and technologies earlier than others are more likely to benefit from exports [Grigoryev, 2021]. Since all the BRICS states have potential in the field of hydrogen energy, comprehensive interaction in this area can ensure successful promotion of their interests in the conditions of the formation of a new global energy system, including their influence on the development of new regulatory procedures, terminology, and standards. The conditions for an active role in the emerging global energy management mechanisms [Fumagalli, 2020] for the BRICS are the implementation of a coordinated policy necessary to overcome the uneven pace of energy transformations in the participating countries and a course towards the introduction of new “clean” technologies, in particular, the development of hydrogen transport, hydrogen production, and the development of hydrogen technologies and the environmental transformation that accompanies it.

#### EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION (EAEU)

As for another Eurasian integration association—the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)—it should be noted that the development of renewable energy sources was not initially reflected in the provisions of the treaty on its establishment. The situation began to change in 2018 in connection with the signing of the Declaration on the Further Development of Integration Processes within the EAEU,<sup>22</sup> reflecting the intention of the member states to implement joint projects in the field of green technologies, energy saving, energy efficiency, renewable energy, etc. This was reinforced in the Statement made in October 2021 by the heads of the EAEU member states,<sup>23</sup> according to which international exchange and nondiscriminatory use of technologies that reduce greenhouse emissions

<sup>18</sup>BRICS Energy Research Directory 2021. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/210902-energy-research-directory.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup>Beijing Declaration of the XIV BRICS Summit dated June 23, 2022. <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5819>.

<sup>20</sup>Joint Statement on the Results of the 21st Russian–Indian Summit “Russia–India: Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Prosperity.” <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/5745>.

<sup>21</sup>Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China on the issue of deepening investment cooperation in the field of sustainable (green) development. <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5769>.

<sup>22</sup>Declaration on the Further Development of Integration Processes within the EAEU. [https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01420213/ms\\_10122018](https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01420213/ms_10122018).

<sup>23</sup>Statement on economic cooperation between the EAEU member states within the climate agenda, October 14, 2021. <https://eec.eaeunion.org/news/zayavlenie-ob-ekonomicheskomo-sotrudnichestve-gosudarstv-chlenov-%20evrazijskogo-ekonomicheskogo-soyuza-v-ramkah-klimaticheskoy-povestki/>. Cited February 21, 2022.

is considered as one of the areas of economic cooperation between the EAEU member states within the framework of the climate agenda. It should be noted that the ESG agenda was included in the Strategy for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025,<sup>24</sup> in accordance with which it is supposed to pool efforts to create and use new technologies and innovations, including green technologies and RES.

Amid sanctions aimed at abandoning Russian energy resources, the EAEU was faced with the urgent need to expand the strategy by giving key importance to hydrogen energy. The latter has found practical implementation in the agreement on the expediency of starting joint research in the development of projects related to hydrogen to increase the competitiveness of hydrogen energy in the EAEU countries, as well as in the creation of a working group in the field of hydrogen energy with the participation of research organizations.<sup>25</sup>

The formation of clusters for the testing of hydrogen technologies, cooperation with enterprises and scientific organizations to create electrolyzers and fuel cells, the adoption of technical solutions for the production of hydrogen at nuclear power plants, and hydrogen transport, as well as the development of mechanisms for financing projects in the field of hydrogen energy will become, as follows from speeches by the Minister for Industry and Agro-Industrial Complex of the Eurasian Economic Commission A. Kamalyan, concrete steps for the further development of the industry within the framework of the EAEU.<sup>26</sup>

Another step in developing cooperation in the field of hydrogen energy was the agreement signed on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 3, 2021, on the joint work of RUSNANO and the Eurasian Development Bank to implement alternative energy, high technologies, and green hydrogen projects in the EAEU countries.<sup>27</sup>

Note also that the EAEU, within the framework of the Greater Eurasian Partnership, is developing cooperation in this area with associations operating in the Eurasian space. In particular, the formation and implementation of energy policy in the Asia–Pacific

region is one of the points of the Cooperation Program between the EAEU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for 2020–2025, as well as an accent point of the Memorandum of Understanding between the EEC and the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations (SCO).<sup>28</sup>

#### INTEGRATION ASSOCIATIONS OF THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION

As for the development of interaction in the field of hydrogen energy within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which almost all member states of the EAEU take part, in the Concept of Cooperation of the SCO Member States in the Energy Sector, adopted on August 12, 2021, the introduction of green energy and energy efficient technologies have received special attention. The Green Belt Program of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, adopted at the anniversary SCO summit, held on September 17, 2021, is aimed at a wider introduction of resource-saving and environmentally friendly technologies.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, along with the SCO Energy Club, which is a platform for interaction between all interested producers and consumers of energy resources of the countries of the organization, the Working Group of the SCO member states in the field of energy was established, the purpose of which is to identify promising areas of practical cooperation.

For the ASEAN, the issues of ensuring energy security and international cooperation in the energy sector are not new [Kopylov, 2011]. The development of regional energy projects, including renewable energy, energy efficiency, and energy conservation, was also provided for by the ASEAN Action Plan in the field of energy cooperation for 2010–2015.

Currently, according to the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, there is a significant potential for supply and demand for hydrogen energy in East Asia. For example, since the end of 2019, Brunei has been exporting liquefied hydrogen to Japan. Singapore is also working closely with Japanese companies to explore the development of hydrogen as a new clean fuel to boost the economy and reduce carbon emissions. However, hydrogen is still not officially on the agenda of countries in the region as an alternative fuel, while the ASEAN Action Plan for Energy Cooperation 2021–2025 envisages policy measures to develop alternative technologies, such as hydrogen storage; to accelerate the energy transition in the

<sup>24</sup>On strategic areas for the development of Eurasian economic integration until 2025, approved by Decision No. 12 of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council of December 12, 2020. [https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01228321/err\\_12012021\\_12](https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01228321/err_12012021_12).

<sup>25</sup>The EEC considered prospects for development of hydrogen energy in the Union. [https://eec.eaeunion.org/news/v-eek-rassmotreli-perspektivy-razvitiya-v-soyuze-vodorodnoj-energetiki/?sphrase\\_id=105167](https://eec.eaeunion.org/news/v-eek-rassmotreli-perspektivy-razvitiya-v-soyuze-vodorodnoj-energetiki/?sphrase_id=105167).

<sup>26</sup>The countries of the Eurasian “five” are developing innovative cooperation in industry. <https://dknews.kz/ru/ekonomika/239913-strany-evraziyskoy-pyaterki-razvivayut-innovacionnoe>.

<sup>27</sup>RUSNANO and EADB to implement alternative energy projects in the EAEU. <https://www.in-power.ru/news/alternativnayaenergetika/38447-rosnano-i-eabr-namereny-realizovat-v-eaes-proekty-v-sfere-alternativn.html>.

<sup>28</sup>The EEC and the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization signed a memorandum of understanding within the anniversary SCO summit. <https://eec.eaeunion.org/news/eek-i-sekretariat-shanhajskoj-organizatsii-sotrudnichestva-podpisali-memorandum-o-vzaimoponimani-v-ramkayubilejnogo-sammita-shos/>.

<sup>29</sup>Documents of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit on September 17, 2021. <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/5698>.



region; and to strengthen energy resilience through innovation and cooperation. Cooperation with Russia is intended to contribute to this goal, as follows from the joint Russia–ASEAN statement adopted at the end of the 4th Russia–ASEAN Summit in October 2021,<sup>30</sup> aimed at expanding joint research, development, production, and use of all energy sources, including renewable and alternative, promoting low-carbon and energy-efficient sustainable energy technologies.

As researchers rightly point out [Phoumin, 2021], to adapt successfully to the processes of formation of the new ASEAN international energy system, it is necessary to work out a roadmap for hydrogen development with a general agreement on political incentives to promote its development and to pursue a clear investment policy to advance hydrogen development and implementation.

As for cooperation in this area within such regional economic initiatives as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and One Belt, One Road, then, for example, the green concept of Belt and Road is unofficially added to the latter [Korneev, 2021].

In turn, recently created by the joint efforts of ASEAN, Japan, China, and South Korea, who actively participate in the international hydrogen trade chains for the energy needs, the largest economic integration entity in East Asia—the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)<sup>31</sup>—is also included in its agenda innovative energy cooperation, one of the areas of which is hydrogen energy. Cooperation between RCEP members can help not only existing strong players but also new ones to achieve competitiveness in the hydrogen export market.

## EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

Actively promoting the idea of global decarbonization, the EU, having adopted the Green Deal, embarked on the path of transformation of the economy and the energy system, in which hydrogen is assigned a key role. A Hydrogen Strategy for a Climate-Neutral Europe,<sup>32</sup> published in 2020, provides for measures to promote the rapid and targeted development of green hydrogen production capacity. These include international cooperation, both with neighboring countries and within international institutions,

<sup>30</sup>Russia–ASEAN Summit. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67019>.

<sup>31</sup>The signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) took place on November 15, 2020, and from January 1, 2022, it entered into force for ten APR countries (Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Japan, Laos, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam).

<sup>32</sup>A hydrogen strategy for a climate-neutral Europe. COM (2020) 301 final, Brussels, 8.7.2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/hydrogen\\_strategy.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/hydrogen_strategy.pdf). Cited August 10, 2021.

to develop international standards, common definitions, and common approaches to methodology.

It is complemented by The European Clean Hydrogen Alliance, an entity that will play a leading role in establishing and shaping the future of the hydrogen market in Europe, to help expand the production, distribution, and deployment of renewable and low-carbon hydrogen sources by 2030 [Belov, 2020], which has launched several initiatives to engage hydrogen stakeholders and encourage investment. However, by 2021, a course correction was required to meet the declared indicators, which led to the adoption of the Fit for 55 agreement,<sup>33</sup> which set the goal to produce up to 5.6 million tons of green hydrogen by 2030. In addition, with the adoption of the Hydrogen and Gas Market Decarbonization Package<sup>34</sup> by the EU Commission in December 2021, a review of existing EU gas legislation has begun to create a regulatory framework for the production and trade of hydrogen.

Fit for 55 is the backbone of REPowerEU, the European Commission's May 2022 plan to make Europe independent of Russian fossil fuels by 2030 in light of Russia's "invasion" of Ukraine. The plan calls for rapidly reducing dependence on Russian fossil fuels and accelerating the green transition, while improving the resilience of pan-European energy systems. Along with other measures for this purpose, it is planned to: carry out general purchases of hydrogen through the EU Energy Platform for all Member States; establish new energy partnerships with reliable suppliers; roll out solar and wind power projects in combination with renewable hydrogen and approve the first pan-European hydrogen projects in the short term, as well as build a 17.5 GW electrolyzer hydrogen accelerator and develop a modern regulatory framework for hydrogen in the medium term (until 2027).

As the Plan suggests, renewable hydrogen is seen as the "key" to replace natural gas, coal and oil in hard-to-decarbonize industries and transport. It should also be noted that along with green hydrogen, other forms of hydrogen also play an important role in replacing natural gas. REPowerEU sets a target of 10 million tons of renewable hydrogen domestic production and the same amount of imported renewable hydrogen by 2030. To achieve the set targets, it is planned to: quickly complete the revision of the hydrogen and gas market package; replenish Horizon Europe's Hydrogen Joint Venture investment to double the number of hydrogen valleys; submit for public consideration two delegated acts on the definition and production of renewable hydrogen; complete the evaluation of the first important projects of common European interest

<sup>33</sup>Fit for 55. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal/fit-for-55-the-eu-plan-for-a-green-transition/>

<sup>34</sup>Hydrogen and decarbonized gas market package. [https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/market-legislation/hydrogen-and-decarbonised-gas-market-package\\_en](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/market-legislation/hydrogen-and-decarbonised-gas-market-package_en). Cited August 10, 2021.

in hydrogen by summer 2023; Accelerate work on missing hydrogen standards – in particular for hydrogen production, infrastructure and instrument end-use; from 2025 to report, in close collaboration with Member States, on the uptake of hydrogen and the use of renewable hydrogen in hard-to-reach appliances in industry and transport.

As steps towards achieving the above goal, one can regard the industry's commitment to tenfold increase in the corresponding production capacity by 2025, enshrined in the Joint Declaration adopted at the European Electrolysis Summit (05.05.2022), as well as the discussion of draft legal acts aimed at clarifying the definition of renewable hydrogen [Belov, 2022].

The goal of REPowerEU to diversify supply and support the EU Energy Platform is being pursued by the EU Energy Platform Task Force. It is designed to provide alternative supply and demand aggregation, conduct capacity coordination and power negotiation, provide support to Regional Task Forces of Member States and neighboring countries, and manage the outreach of international partners. According to the plan, the combined international activity is expected to focus on establishing a long-term cooperation framework with trusted partners through binding or non-binding agreements that support the development of gas, hydrogen and clean energy procurement projects, while fully utilizing the alliance's collective strength.

In addition, the IPCEI Hy2Tech approved by the European Commission on July 15, 2022, "the first ever important project of common European interest in the hydrogen sector," contributes to the implementation of the REPowerEU plan. It involves 35 companies and 41 projects from 15 Member States. The project aims to develop innovative technologies for the hydrogen value chain to decarbonize industrial processes and mobility.

The documents discussed above are intended to ensure cooperation in areas where it is more effective to act in a coordinated manner at the EU level, rather than at the national level. The key factor for achieving the goals stated in them should be the renewal of national energy plans and strategies, including in the area under consideration.

It should be noted that at present almost all EU countries have developed hydrogen strategies. However, they differ significantly. For example, Germany puts an emphasis on the chemical, petrochemical, and steel industries, as well as on heavy vehicles; France prioritizes the replacement of carbon-based hydrogen in existing industrial sectors and the production of electrolyzers; the Netherlands develops a hydrogen infrastructure to connect various users; Norway aims at hydrogen production close to customers and transporting CO<sub>2</sub> back to Norway for storage; while Spain and Portugal seek renewable hydrogen production and

domestic consumption with long-term export targets.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the existing differences, it is essential that national ambitions develop over time into a common strategy at the European level. As rightly noted by researchers, structural differences between EU countries open up the potential for a new European division of labor within a common hydrogen network, in terms of both production and consumption. This highlights the need for cross-country cooperation when planning the European hydrogen infrastructure [Wolf and Zander, 2021]. The aforementioned alliance, which is open to all stakeholders (industrial companies, government agencies, and the research and innovation community, as well as representatives of civil society), is also called upon to contribute to this, both striving to contribute to the introduction of renewable and low-carbon hydrogen and planning to use it by ensuring the use of advanced hydrogen technologies and equipment in cooperation with the relevant EU partner networks in the field of research, development, and innovation [Belov, 2020].

In general, the set of documents aimed at the transition to a carbon-neutral economy and society in Europe by adopting the principles of a circular economy and the use of hydrogen on a large scale as a fuel, as a means of storing energy as a feedstock for various industries [Bonciu, 2020], including the Green Deal, the New Industrial Strategy for Europe, the EU Energy System Integration Strategy, and the Hydrogen Strategy for a Climate-Neutral Europe, could well be seen as a comprehensive roadmap. At the same time, the adoption of REPowerEU as a first step to create an internal market for hydrogen and calcified gases, as well as regulation of the calcined gas sector, has become a serious bid to be a major player in today's geopolitical energy landscape.

Nevertheless, in the end, as noted by I. Kopytin and A. Popadko, the prospects for the development of hydrogen energy depend on the ability of companies in the real sector to integrate hydrogen into their business models [Kopytin and Popadko, 2021]. Within the framework of this article, it is not possible to consider all international projects of leading European companies. Let's take a look at some of them, for example:

- the NorthH2 green hydrogen project implemented by Royal Dutch Shell in cooperation with RWE, Equinor, Gasunie and Groningen Sea Ports;

- H2SHIPS – an EU project aimed at developing infrastructure for shipping using a hydrogen engine, which is implemented by a subsidiary of the EDF Group;

<sup>35</sup>Hydrogen on the horizon: Ready, almost set, go?, Working Paper, National Hydrogen Strategies. [https://www.worldenergy.org/assets/downloads/Working\\_Paper\\_-\\_National\\_Hydrogen\\_Strategies\\_-\\_September\\_2021.pdf](https://www.worldenergy.org/assets/downloads/Working_Paper_-_National_Hydrogen_Strategies_-_September_2021.pdf). Cited August 11, 2022.

– HyLaw, an FCH JU funded project to raise awareness of legal barriers that need to be removed, brought together 23 partners from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom;

– GET H2 is a project for the construction of an integrated hydrogen infrastructure linking the electric power industry, thermal power industry, industry and transport along the entire value chain, in which RWE-Generation, Nowega, OGE, Gascade, BP, BASF, Stadtwerke Lingen, Hydrogenious Technologies and others are participating.

Also supported by ArcelorMittal, Enagás, Fertiberia and DH2 Energy is HyDeal Spain, the world's largest renewable hydrogen project (according to IRENA) for green steel, green ammonia and green fertilizer. BP Plc will lead another of the world's largest clean energy projects, AREH, which aims to bring green hydrogen from Australia to key markets.

Examples of the latest hydrogen projects of European companies include a large hydrogen storage facility being built by Uniper SE, Robert Bosch GmbH's investment in the development of components for the electrolysis production of hydrogen until 2030, a project by Deutsche Bahn AG and Siemens Mobility GmbH to create a train running on hydrogen fuel. and others [Belov, 2022].

#### LEGAL SUPPORT OF HYDROGEN ENERGY

For the formation of a new sector of the economy, it is of fundamental importance to create a system of legal regulation not only at the international level but also at the national level. At present, hydrogen energy is only at the beginning of its development. As it develops, legal regulation in this area will begin to take shape. To date, we can state the absence of a comprehensive and clearly defined legislative framework necessary for the development of hydrogen energy.

Interest in hydrogen is growing, and an increasingly more countries are involved in the development of clean hydrogen value chains. It is significant that over the past five years the number of states that have developed or are developing strategies for the use of hydrogen has increased from 1 to 30.<sup>36</sup> However, there are significant differences in the scope and details of these strategies.

Countries claiming leadership in clean hydrogen technology include Japan, the United States, Germany, South Korea, China, and Russia. Policies to regulate and incentivize industry players and consumers, as well as the development of a regulatory frame-

work to facilitate hydrogen production, have an important role to play in achieving leadership.

For example, Japan, the first country that adopted a national hydrogen strategy (2017) and announced its intention to create a “hydrogen society” through the widespread use of hydrogen in all sectors of the economy, currently has no laws regarding the use of hydrogen [Niunoya et al., 2021]. Hydrogen safety is governed by the provisions of the High Pressure Gas Safety Act,<sup>37</sup> and its storage and transportation, along with the above, by the Road Traffic Act,<sup>38</sup> the Road Transport Vehicle Act,<sup>39</sup> the Seaports Act, rules for the transport of dangerous goods, and other rules that establish technical standards. Environmental safety issues in hydrogen handling are regulated by the Air Pollution Control Act,<sup>40</sup> Noise Regulation Law,<sup>41</sup> the Vibration Regulation Law,<sup>42</sup> and others.

Regulation in this area in the United States at the federal level, dating back to the 1990s, is based on the provisions of the Spark M. Matsunaga Hydrogen Research, Development, and Demonstration Program Act,<sup>43</sup> Hydrogen Future Act (1996),<sup>44</sup> Energy Policy Act (2005),<sup>45</sup> Energy Independence and Security Act (2007), and the 45Q Tax Credit.<sup>46</sup> As part of the latter, in July 2020 alone, about \$64 million were allocated to finance 18 projects for the affordable production, storage, transportation, and use of hydrogen [Azni and Md Khalid, 2021]. In 2002, the National Hydrogen Energy Roadmap was adopted.<sup>47</sup> It is also important to note here that each US state has its own roadmaps for the implementation of hydrogen infrastructure. At the state level, California, Texas, and

<sup>37</sup>High Pressure Gas Safety Act. Act No. 204 of June 7, 1951. <https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/1974>.

<sup>38</sup>Road Traffic Act. 1960. Act No. 32 of 2022. Official Gazette, April 27, 2022. <https://perma.cc/LJA3-7YHL>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>39</sup>Road Transport Vehicle Act Amended. Act No. 185 of 1951. <https://perma.cc/KRD3-8WXU>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>40</sup>Air Pollution Control Act. Act No. 97 of June 10, 1968 (2018 ed.). <https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/3561/en>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>41</sup>Noise Regulation Law. <https://www.env.go.jp/en/laws/air/noise/ap.html>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>42</sup>Vibration Regulation Law. <https://www.env.go.jp/en/laws/air/vibration/ap.html>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>43</sup>Spark, M. Matsunaga Research, Development, and Demonstration Program Act. [https://www.hydrogen.energy.gov/pdfs/matsunaga\\_act\\_1990.pdf](https://www.hydrogen.energy.gov/pdfs/matsunaga_act_1990.pdf). Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>44</sup>Hydrogen Future Act. [https://www.hydrogen.energy.gov/pdfs/hydrogen\\_future\\_act\\_1996.pdf](https://www.hydrogen.energy.gov/pdfs/hydrogen_future_act_1996.pdf). Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>45</sup>Energy Policy Act of 2005. <https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2014/03/f14/EPAof2005.pdf>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>46</sup>45Q Tax Credit. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/26/45Q>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>47</sup>National Hydrogen Energy Roadmap. [https://www.hydrogen.energy.gov/pdfs/national\\_h2\\_roadmap.pdf](https://www.hydrogen.energy.gov/pdfs/national_h2_roadmap.pdf). Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>36</sup>IRENA (2022), *Geopolitics of the Energy Transformation: The Hydrogen Factor*, International Renewable Energy Agency, Abu Dhabi. [https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2022/Jan/IRENA\\_Geopolitics\\_Hydrogen\\_2022.pdf](https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2022/Jan/IRENA_Geopolitics_Hydrogen_2022.pdf).

Louisiana are recognized by the US Department of Energy as top hydrogen producing states.

In South Korea, hydrogen energy is subject to the Act on the Development and Use of Alternative Energy Technologies, adopted back in 1987. The next step to create a legal framework for regulating relations in this area after the adoption in 2019 of the Hydrogen Economy Roadmap until 2040 in Korea<sup>48</sup> was the adoption in 2020 of the Act on Fostering the Hydrogen Economy and Hydrogen Safety Management (Hydrogen Economy Law).<sup>49</sup>

Germany is also one of the few countries with specific legislation in this area. Along with the National Hydrogen Strategy, adopted in 2020,<sup>50</sup> the updated Energy Act is in force,<sup>51</sup> containing provisions ensuring the regulation of hydrogen networks, as well as the Electric Mobility Act<sup>52</sup> and Climate Action Plan up to 2050.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike the above countries, China has not yet enacted laws or regulations on the use of hydrogen energy. However, the Energy Law<sup>54</sup> lists hydrogen as an energy source that is subject to inclusion in the energy statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics.

In Russia, according to the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation On the National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Development of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2024<sup>55</sup> and the provisions of the Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2035,<sup>56</sup> hydrogen energy is one of the priority areas of the state energy policy, and its development is one of the strategic tasks facing the state. The forecast for the scientific and technological development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030 classifies hydrogen technologies as one of

the most promising areas of scientific technology research.

The program of measures designed to ensure the formation of hydrogen energy in Russia was approved by the roadmap for the development of hydrogen energy in the Russian Federation until 2024.<sup>57</sup> The result of the first stage of its implementation was the development and approval of the Concept for the Development of Hydrogen Energy in Russia.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, the priority measures to be implemented at the first stage of the industry development include activities to create the hydrogen energy necessary to ensure its functioning and integration into the country's economy with access to the international markets of the legal framework. As for the currently existing regulatory framework, it includes a system of standards governing the generation, storage, transportation, and some types of use of hydrogen and establishing a common terminology, safety requirements, test methods, etc., as well as legislative norms in energy supply, which are mainly declarative and programmatic in nature and only indirectly regulate relations in the area under consideration.

Also, when characterizing documents of a program-strategic nature aimed at developing the area under consideration in the face of new economic challenges, one should also mention the Comprehensive Program for the Development of the Low-Carbon Hydrogen Energy Industry in the Russian Federation until 2035, which is under development (which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2022). It "will become an aggregator of all previously adopted profile documents – the road map and the Concept for the development of the industry." Particular attention in the document will be paid to the development of domestic competencies and technologies as the final product for export. In addition, strategic initiatives for the socio-economic development of the country (federal projects).

In search of approaches to the legalization of hydrogen energy, lawyers note the possibility of extending gas supply legislation to relations in the field of hydrogen circulation,<sup>59</sup> as well as the use of the

<sup>48</sup>Hydrogen Economy Roadmap of Korea. [https://docs.wix-static.com/ugd/45185a\\_fc2f37727595437590891a3c7ca0d025.pdf](https://docs.wix-static.com/ugd/45185a_fc2f37727595437590891a3c7ca0d025.pdf). Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>49</sup>Act on Fostering the Hydrogen Economy and Hydrogen Safety Management. <https://www.law.go.kr/LSW/lsInfoP.do?lsiSeq=213891&chrClsCd=010202&urlMode=lsInfoP&efYd=20210205&ancYnChk=#0000>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>50</sup>National Hydrogen Strategy. [https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/EN/Publikationen/Energie/the-national-hydrogen-strategy.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=6](https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/EN/Publikationen/Energie/the-national-hydrogen-strategy.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=6). Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>51</sup>Energy Act amendment 4, July 2021.

<sup>52</sup>Electric Mobility Act of 2015. [https://www.now-gmbh.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NOW\\_Leitfaden-EmoG\\_03.22.pdf](https://www.now-gmbh.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NOW_Leitfaden-EmoG_03.22.pdf). Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>53</sup>Climate Action Plan 2050. <https://www.bmuv.de/en/download/climate-action-plan-2050>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>54</sup>[http://www.nea.gov.cn/2020-04/10/c\\_138963212.htm](http://www.nea.gov.cn/2020-04/10/c_138963212.htm). Cited July 20, 2021.

<sup>55</sup>Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 7, 2018, No. 204, On the National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Development of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2024, *Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation* (2018), No. 20, Article 2817.

<sup>56</sup>Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of June 9, 2020, No. 1523-r, On Approval of the Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2035, *Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation* (2020), No. 24, Article 3847.

<sup>57</sup>Action plan (roadmap) for the development of hydrogen energy in the Russian Federation until 2024, approved by Order of the Government of the Russian Federation dated October 12, 2020, No. 2634-r. <https://minenergo.gov.ru/node/19194>.

<sup>58</sup>Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of August 5, 2021, No. 2162-r, On Approval of the Concept for the Development of Hydrogen Energy in the Russian Federation. <http://static.government.ru/media/files/5JFns1CDAKqYKzZ0mnRADAw2NqVsexl.pdf>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>59</sup>See Semenov, K.S. (2022) Pravovoe regulirovanie vodorodnoi energetiki Rossii [Legal regulation of hydrogen energy in Russia], in *Energeticheskoe pravo: Modeli i tendentsii razvitiya: Sbornik materialov III Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii* [Energy Law: Development Models and Trends: Proceedings of the III International Scientific and Practical Conference], Ed. by A. V. Gabov, Belgorod: ID BelGU NIU BelGU, pp. 195–199.

already established infrastructure of the oil and gas industry for the implementation of hydrogen projects with targeted study of projects to create infrastructure solutions for hydrogen energy.<sup>60</sup>

As noted in the legal literature,<sup>61</sup> to create an effective legal framework for the emerging energy industry, a number of tasks have to be solved: to develop and legislate a definition of the concept of hydrogen, to include hydrogen among strategic energy resources, to determine the legal regime of hydrogen as an object of public relations, to form a system of relations between the subjects of hydrogen energy, etc. Of no small importance for improving the legal framework for the development of hydrogen energy, along with measures to create mechanisms to stimulate and support the development of hydrogen energy, is amending tax legislation to support the development of hydrogen energy and making changes and additions to the system of trade and customs regulation.

One of the problematic issues is the inclusion of hydrogen in renewable energy sources. The Federal Law of the Russian Federation On the Electric Power Industry<sup>62</sup> contains a closed list of types of energy related to renewable energy, in which hydrogen is not listed, which, in turn, deprives it of state support measures aimed at stimulating renewable energy sources. However, other countries are paying increased attention to the issues of stimulating the development of hydrogen energy. For example, the US Energy Policy Act defines hydrogen as an alternative fuel, and this allows for the full benefits of this Act. In turn, in South Korea, the Law on the Development and Use of Alternative Energy Technologies of 1987 includes the concept of new and renewable energy, where hydrogen is classified as new energy. French legislation enshrines and defines concepts such as *renewable hydrogen*, *low-carbon hydrogen*, and *carbon-based hydrogen*.

In fairness, it should be noted that the current regulation of hydrogen energy in foreign countries is also not free from gaps that hinder the development of the industry. For example, German legislation does not cover aspects such as the capture and storage of emis-

sions associated with the production of blue hydrogen, while the new rules included in the Energy Law are only transitional, and the technical rules for increasing the mixing of hydrogen with the natural gas network are still under consideration.<sup>63</sup> In France, the sale of hydrogen was among the unregulated areas.<sup>64</sup> In the United States, challenges include the need to upgrade codes and standards applicable to hydrogen storage systems and interface technologies and a lack of standardization of hardware and operating procedures.

In addition to legislative measures, the development of hydrogen energy is regulated by instruments such as standardization and certification. However, at this stage, the priorities for standardization between states vary greatly. This hinders cooperation and delays the development of hydrogen demand and investment and raises questions about harmonization.<sup>65</sup> A good example of standards initiatives is Japan's proposal to develop international regulations for the maritime transport of liquefied hydrogen through the International Maritime Organization (IMO). With regard to the standards adopted by states, the Standard and Assessment of Low-Carbon Hydrogen, Clean Hydrogen, and Renewable Hydrogen is worth mentioning as the first official green hydrogen standard in the world, which provides methods for calculating greenhouse gases for various means of hydrogen production [Liu et al., 2022], released by China in December 2020.

A serious problem, in our opinion, is that, in an environment where legislative and regulatory measures are still in the development stage, hydrogen projects are launched rapidly by simplifying the existing framework, as well as reducing potential barriers and administrative burden.<sup>66</sup> The desire for rapid implementation of such projects comes into conflict with safety, which is often seen as an obstacle to promoting the hydrogen market. The widespread use of hydrogen technologies carries risks for society, is associated with negative environmental effects that have not yet been calculated [Degtyarev and Berezkin, 2021], and requires the presence of highly qualified and trained personnel who can ensure the safety of the operation of such systems, as well as the development and adoption of a number of stringent requirements, standards, and regulations, which ensure safety and which are

<sup>60</sup>See Vasil'kova, S.V. (2022) Razvitie vodorodnoi energetiki v Rossii: Vyzovy vremeni i aktual'nye pravovye voprosy [Development of hydrogen energy in Russia: Challenges of the time and current legal issues], *Ekonomika. Pravo. Obshchestvo* [Economics. Law. Society] 7 (2).

<sup>61</sup>See Semenovich, K.S. (2022) O kontseptsii razvitiya pravovogo regulirovaniya vodorodnoi energetiki Rossii [On the concept of development of legal regulation of hydrogen energy in Russia], *Zhurnal rossiiskogo prava* [Journal of Russian Law] 26 (2), 47–56; Ratushnyak, P.S. (2021) Tekushchaya situatsiya i perspektivy razvitiya vodorodnoi energetiki za rubezhom i v Rossii: Problemy i zadachi pravovogo regulirovaniya [Current situation and prospects for the development of hydrogen energy abroad and in Russia: Problems and tasks of legal regulation], *Pravovoi energeticheskii forum* [Legal Energy Forum], No. 1, 47–54.

<sup>62</sup>Federal Law of the Russian Federation of March 26, 2003, No. 35-FZ, On the Electric Power Industry, *Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation* (2003), No. 13, Article 1177.

<sup>63</sup>CMS expert guide to hydrogen energy law and regulation facing the future of hydrogen. <https://cms.law/en/int/expert-guides/cms-expert-guide-to-hydrogen>. Cited <https://cms.law/en/int/expert-guides/cms-expert-guide-to-hydrogen> August 10, 2021.

<sup>64</sup>Hydrogen law and regulation in France. <https://cms.law/en/int/expert-guides/cms-expert-guide-to-hydrogen/france>. Cited August 10, 2021.

<sup>65</sup>Hydrogen on the horizon: Ready, almost set, go?, Working Paper, National Hydrogen Strategies. [https://www.worldenergy.org/assets/downloads/Working\\_Paper\\_-\\_National\\_Hydrogen\\_Strategies\\_-\\_September\\_2021.pdf](https://www.worldenergy.org/assets/downloads/Working_Paper_-_National_Hydrogen_Strategies_-_September_2021.pdf). Cited August 11, 2022.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

currently absent [Litvinenko et al., 2020]. In this part, it is significant that between 2000 and 2020, more than 90 accidents occurred in the field of hydrogen energy, such as the explosion of hydrogen storage tanks in South Korea in 2019 and the explosion of hydrogen at a Taiwanese power plant in 2022 [Chen et al., 2022].

## CONCLUSIONS

Countries are still in search of optimal legal solutions in the field of hydrogen energy. “Optimality” here is determined by the fact that, when creating a new “hydrogen economy,” countries (especially the Russian Federation) should not lose their existing competitive advantages, especially due to attempts by a number of states and their associations to deprive Russia of such competitive advantages using sanctions.

With the development of internal regulation, one should also not lose sight of the international legal component in the development of hydrogen energy, especially since many issues that are important and controversial in the field of traditional energy (for example, transportation using pipelines) will also be relevant for the development of hydrogen energy. International cooperation in the field of hydrogen energy is currently actively developing; however, even within the framework of individual integration associations, clear strategies and plans have not yet been formed, which does not contribute to achieving visible effects from cooperation, while ensuring the stability of international energy markets requires a global dialogue on current energy issues.

Ideally, it is necessary to develop new rules at the international level, which should be enshrined in the relevant international agreements in the area under consideration. In addition, the issues of international coordination of the activities of international “hydrogen” initiatives and international organizations the activities of which are more or less related to hydrogen, and, possibly, the issue of creating an international organization that would become a world center for cooperation in the field of hydrogen, also need to be addressed.

This, however, seems to be a long way off. To what extent (and how) international legal acts will determine the development of hydrogen energy is still not completely clear; at the same time, it is obvious that, considering current geopolitical events, the scenario of creating a common international document, broad in scope of the participating countries and deep in scope of subjects of regulation, is not visible. Most likely, in the coming years we will see the implementation of the scenario for regulating hydrogen energy issues at the level of general agreements (declarative in content), bilateral and multilateral (within individual associations of states).

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- gen economy], *Okruzhayushchaya sreda i energovedenie* [Environment and Energy Science], No. 1, 14–23.
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## Economic Problems

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# The Infrastructure Competition between the United States and China in Developing Countries

A. V. Boreyko<sup>a,\*</sup>, A. A. Vernigora<sup>a,\*\*</sup>, and S. V. Kislitsyn<sup>a,\*\*\*,#</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Center for Strategic Planning Studies, Primakov National Research Institute of the World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

\*e-mail: [aboreyko@imemo.ru](mailto:aboreyko@imemo.ru)

\*\*e-mail: [avernigora@imemo.ru](mailto:avernigora@imemo.ru)

\*\*\*e-mail: [skislitsyn@imemo.ru](mailto:skislitsyn@imemo.ru)

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**Abstract**—A brief comparative analysis of US and Chinese infrastructure projects is provided. The world-system approach, which sets the objective possibilities and limitations of the strategies of the United States and China as interconnected parts of the world economy and politics, was chosen as the methodological basis. The first part of this article describes the world-system approach, as well as the position of the People's Republic of China in the modern system of international relations. The second part is devoted to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. The third part provides an analysis of counterinitiatives put forward by the United States.

**Keywords:** China, United States, Belt and Road Initiative, digital infrastructure, Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, world-systems theory, global leadership

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American–Chinese contradictions are becoming central to the emerging system of international relations. After the idea of building effective cooperation between the two countries (including the so-called Great Two (G2) in the early 2010s) failed, the parties began to move to strategic competition. A peculiarity is the emphasis on trade, economic, and technological areas.

This development of events requires fundamentally new approaches from the United States, which they have not encountered before. The confrontation with the Soviet Union was predominantly military–political and ideological. At the same time, trade, foreign direct investment, and technological leadership in the civilian sector were a source of income for the United States in the fight against the Soviet Union. Now,

these areas are becoming the main ones in the confrontation between the two global leaders.

In modern conditions, these areas also imply the creation of an appropriate transport and telecommunications infrastructure—the basis for intercountry cooperation. In this area, the China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become the largest global initiative, which has set the relevant standards and has turned into a serious lever of political and economic influence.

The United States, considering China as its main strategic competitor, is forced to respond to Chinese projects. However, their capabilities are currently limited. The Biden administration has announced several international infrastructure initiatives in recent years, the prospects for which are still unclear. This article provides a brief comparative analysis of American and Chinese infrastructure projects.

This study was conducted on the basis of a world-system approach, which reflects US–Chinese competition on a global scale. The article consists of three parts. The first part describes the world-systems approach and also examines the position of the PRC in the modern system of international relations through its prism. The second part of the article is devoted to the Chinese BRI initiative, and the third part analyzes the counterinitiatives put forward by the United States.

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<sup>#</sup> Anton Vladimirovich Boreyko, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), is a Research Fellow at the Center for Strategic Planning Studies, Primakov National Research Institute of the World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS). Alina Andreevna Vernigora is a Junior Research Fellow at the Center for Strategic Planning Studies, Primakov National Research Institute of the World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS). Sergey Vladimirovich Kislitsyn, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), is Head of the Center for Strategic Planning Studies, Primakov National Research Institute of the World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS).

## AMERICAN–CHINESE CONFRONTATION THROUGH THE PRISM OF A WORLD-SYSTEM APPROACH

The competition between China and the United States can be viewed using different paradigms of international relations theory. Neoliberalism sees in it an ideological rivalry between an authoritarian and democratic system; neorealism sees it as a political struggle to establish a new world order; and neo-Marxism sees it as a confrontation between imperialist powers. In this article, the theoretical basis of the analysis is the world-systems approach, which analyzes the infrastructure competition between the United States and China in developing countries.

The “world-system” is a combination of the global economic system and multiple political and cultural systems. The behavior of agents depends on their belonging to one of the levels of the world-system: periphery, semiperiphery, or center. Ownership is defined as the ability to maximize profits through leadership in the possession of technological, financial, political, or military resources. The key property of the world-system is the constant flow of resources from the countries of the periphery to the countries of the semiperiphery and the center [Wallerstein, 2011].

Currently, the United States remains the leader of the world-system and strives to maintain its status [Watkins, 2019]. The problem is that for many years the United States has been struggling with a falling rate of profit [Abdulov et al., 2021], which is due to an increase in capital-intensive production in relation to labor-intensive production and rising labor costs.<sup>1</sup> To reverse the current trend, the United States is using capital outflows by shifting labor-intensive operations within global value chains (GVCs) to peripheral and semiperipheral countries.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US-promoted policy of neoliberalism took on a global scale, forming a new world order. The structural reforms of the Washington Consensus included the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the reduction of restrictions on foreign direct investment, which made it easier for US companies to acquire domestic assets in peripheral countries and integrate them into GVCs [Watkins, 2019].

The United States gradually abandoned the Westphalian principle of the inviolability of state sovereignty. Independence becomes a “license” that Washington can revoke if the government does not abide by liberal political and economic norms [Watkins, 2019]. In the current paradigm, Beijing was supposed to open access to the national market for American transnational companies (TNCs), as well as to carry out neoliberal reforms of the political system. Depending on how Chinese policy met these requirements, Wash-

ington planned to “support, contain, or balance” Beijing.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, US foreign policy and economic risk assessment documents describe China as a “revisionist power” that seeks to revise the prevailing international conditions. At the same time, Beijing’s actions are aimed at qualitative changes in the configuration of the balance of power and are mainly expressed in trade and economic aspects. This strategy is driven by the long-term goals and strategic plans of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

## THE PERIPHERY WITH CHINESE SPECIFICS

Paradoxically, US neoliberal policy partly contributed to the strengthening of the economic and political power of China, which began to integrate into the world market system as early as the late 1970s. However, the rise of export-oriented “market socialism” that took place in the 1990s occurred precisely on the wave of neoliberal globalization. During this period, the country developed in accordance with the “flying geese” paradigm of the Japanese economist Kaname Akamatsu [Taush, 2019]. Like other “catching up” economies, China offered cheap labor to developed countries, but it had unique advantages: a vast domestic market, a developed industry, qualified personnel, a literate population, and a developed state strategic planning system that made it possible to manage loans, organize infrastructure, and control capital flows centrally by redistributing resources across industries and regions. These internal factors qualitatively distinguished the development of China from the “new industrial countries.” Throughout the 1990s, Beijing benefited from these advantages, maintaining state dominance in the economy and raising its status in the world system, including through American investment but without directly challenging Washington’s dominance.

## FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE SEMIPERIPHERY

The first successful test of this course was the Asian economic crisis of 1997. However, it also showed that, if Beijing continued to develop an export-oriented development model, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), and invest profits in American securities, then as a result, the country would face the threat of losing control over national assets. For example, the default of South Korea during the Asian crisis in 1997 led to a sharp weakening of state sovereignty in the field of the economy.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> National Security Strategy 1993, National Security Strategy Archive. <http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-1993>.

<sup>3</sup> Tabb, W.K. (1998) The East Asian financial crisis, *Monthly Review* 50 (2). [https://monthlyreviewarchives.org/index.php/mr/article/view/MR-050-02-1998-06\\_3](https://monthlyreviewarchives.org/index.php/mr/article/view/MR-050-02-1998-06_3).

<sup>1</sup> Labor cost index, The Global Economy. [https://www.the-globaleconomy.com/USA/labor\\_cost/](https://www.the-globaleconomy.com/USA/labor_cost/).

Accordingly, the strategy of Beijing in the 2000s changed: the main driver of growth was investment in the national market. The government identified strategic sectors for the development of the economy, creating favorable conditions for the respective companies, “national champions” [Hemphill and White, 2013]. Surplus capital was directed in the form of FDI as part of the Go Global strategy, which was facilitated by joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 [Jenkins, 2019, p. 18]. Since then, China has been importing commodities from semiperipheral and peripheral countries.

The global financial crisis of 2008 strengthened the chosen strategy. Despite the diversification of investments, China still kept a significant part of its savings in US debt securities. Some of them are in the notorious mortgage agencies the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac). The disappearance of these funds came as a shock to Beijing, which nevertheless fell into the “dollar trap,” as it could not rely on swap lines<sup>4</sup> from the Federal Reserve System (FRS).

As a result, the state has become even more active in stimulating the national economy, increasing aggregate supply and demand [Watkins, 2019]. These measures worked, but they led to a further increase in the share of capital-intensive industries and an increase in the cost of labor [Huang and Liugang, 2021]. Falling profitability slowed down GDP growth<sup>5</sup> and caused the accumulation of excess capacity, especially in the field of infrastructure (electricity and construction sectors), which limited the ability to develop in line with the “world factory.”

#### FROM THE SEMIPERIPHERY TO THE CENTER

Against the backdrop of a new wave of the global economic crisis that began in 2014, Chinese politicians began to promote the idea of a radical change in the country’s place in the international system of labor division—from a “global factory” to a world technological leader. In the first stage (2015–2025), China should achieve technological sovereignty, and in the second (2020–2035), it should set the standards for innovative production for the whole world.<sup>6</sup>

In 2015, the first stage started, and the industrial development strategy “Made in China 2025”

appeared. During the 13th (2016–2020) and 14th (2021–2025) five-year plans, the Chinese economy has been realigning itself to high-tech manufacturing in line with the fourth industrial revolution.<sup>7</sup>

The second stage began in 2020, when the government launched the China Standards 2035 strategy. In accordance with it, China should become the creator of industry 4.0 standards: for example, in the field of industrial automation or environmentally friendly technologies. The state invests in these industries, creating the necessary infrastructure.<sup>8</sup>

In an effort to achieve global leadership in high technology, China is betting on the development of a new infrastructure—“digital, smart, and innovative”—which the CCP leadership announced in 2020. The strategy complements the “Made in China 2025” and “China Standards 2035” programs, and the announced amount of public spending in the 14th “five-year plan” will be approximately \$1.4 trillion. The funds will be used to develop 5G networks, artificial intelligence, the Internet of things, intercity high-speed rail, and research institutes. In contrast to infrastructure policy during the 2008 crisis, the government is increasingly working with private investment.<sup>9</sup>

From the point of view of the strategy of global leadership in the field of new standards, this investment policy allows for the formation of a digital environment dominated by Chinese technologies. This aspect is also noted by American analysts, who believe that government subsidies, loans, and digitalization of the One Belt, One Road project contributed to the rapid growth of Huawei and other technology companies [Capri, 2020].

#### ONE BELT, ONE ROAD

The One Belt, One Road (OBOR) integration project was launched in 2014 as a result of the merger of the land Belt and Road and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road [Jenkins, 2019, p. 341]. It is aimed at creating a global production infrastructure dominated by Chinese goods, finance, and technology and is a set of relevant investment programs. By 2021, 145 countries had become participants in the project and had gained the opportunity to export products to the largest market on favorable terms, receive financing, and use advanced technologies, which became especially

<sup>4</sup> A swap line is an agreement between two central banks of different countries on the mutual exchange of currencies at fixed rates.

<sup>5</sup> GDP growth (annual %)—China, The World Bank. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>.

<sup>6</sup> Cyrill, M. (2018) What is Made in China 2025 and why has it made the world so nervous?, China Briefing, Dec. 28 (2018). <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/made-in-china-2025-explained/>.

<sup>7</sup> The fourth industrial revolution is the development of digital industrial technologies.

<sup>8</sup> Koty, A. (2020) What is the China Standards 2035 plan and how will it impact emerging industries?, China Briefing, July 2 (2020). <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/what-is-china-standards-2035-plan-how-will-it-impact-emerging-technologies-what-is-link-made-in-china-2025-goals/>.

<sup>9</sup> Wong, D., How can foreign technology investors benefit from China’s new infrastructure plan?, China Briefing, Aug. 7 (2020). <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/how-foreign-technology-investors-benefit-from-chinas-new-infrastructure-plan/>.

important considering the slowdown in global GDP growth after the 2008 crisis.

Latin America and the Caribbean countries (LACC) began joining the project in 2018, with 21 countries out of 33 joining in four years [Albright, 2022]. Since the BRI brings together trade, finance, investment, and infrastructure projects within a single space, it provides China with a strategic advantage in the region in terms of commodity and food security. China's success is confirmed by American experts, noting, for example, the predominance of Chinese companies in the territory of the free economic zone in the Panama Canal.<sup>10</sup> In addition, as a result of its investment policy, China is gaining control over technology, which gives it the ability to control strategic infrastructure in Venezuela, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Costa Rica.<sup>11</sup> The development of closer economic integration allows China to enlist the support of elites in the region, regardless of their political orientation. For example, Beijing's position on Taiwan as of 2022 is shared by 25 of 33 Latin American states, including left, right, and centrist regimes.<sup>12</sup>

In Central Asia, the development of the OBOR involves the creation of several land transport corridors, two of which, northern and central, run through the territory of regional states. Like Latin America, Central Asia exports raw materials to China. Kazakhstan supplies metals and oil; Uzbekistan, cotton fiber; and Kyrgyzstan, scrap metal and livestock products. In connection with this trend, most investment projects in the region are tied to "hard" infrastructure: these are gas and oil pipelines, as well as transport hubs. Over the past 30 years, the volume of trade flows between regions has increased 100 times.<sup>13</sup>

Since the BRI was originally supposed to link China with Europe, the next region on the route after Central Asia was the Middle East. Already in 2016, Beijing became the largest investor in this region as well,<sup>14</sup> although back in 2009 it accounted for less than

1% of direct investment. As in Central Asia, the strategic area for Chinese investment here is the fuel and energy sector and industry, as well as transport infrastructure.

Beijing's Middle East Strategy was published in 2016.<sup>15</sup> Cooperation with the countries of the region is formed according to the "1 + 2 + 3" formula, which is based on the energy sector (1). Its development is accompanied by the modernization of infrastructure and an increase in trade and financial investments (2), which should subsequently ensure close cooperation in three (3) high-tech areas—nuclear energy, space exploration, and renewable energy sources [Lin, 2017]. China is balancing between the two leading players in the region—Iran and Saudi Arabia. Beijing agreed with Riyadh to coordinate the OBOR with the Vision 2030 program and concluded a package of deals worth \$65 billion, while supporting Iran's candidacy for membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Tehran was also granted a \$10 billion loan for infrastructure development.

If the agreements with the Gulf countries relate to cooperation in the field of energy and technology, then projects in the Maghreb and Mashriq regions are predominantly infrastructural. The development of port areas through Chinese investment is taking place in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. Together with the construction of ports in the nearby territories, special economic zones are being created, where Chinese production is located on preferential terms.

Back in 2008, the China–Egypt TEDA Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation zone (TEDA Suez) was founded. The PRC is also participating in the construction of a new administrative cluster in the eastern part of Cairo, infrastructure projects near the Suez Canal, and railways and a container port on the Mediterranean coast. Another port is planned to be built in Algiers. The first Algerian deep-water port of El Hamdania in the eastern part of the country will be able to compete with the Moroccan port of Tangier Med. According to some statements, in exchange for construction and investment, China will receive the right to manage the hub for 25 years.<sup>16</sup>

China is also actively increasing its presence in Africa. Thus, as of 2022, 49 countries of the continent are already participating in the BRI. Several projects are expected in the areas of infrastructure and the development of mobile communications, telecommunications, and fisheries. In addition, there are separate programs for the construction of an oil terminal in Mombasa, as well as the production of vaccines in

<sup>10</sup>Nugent, C. and Campell, C. (2021) The U.S. and China are battling for influence in Latin America, and the pandemic has raised the stakes, *Time*, Feb. 4 (2021). <https://time.com/5936037/us-china-latin-america-influence/>.

<sup>11</sup>Chiodi, L. and Hoang Anh, T. N. (2022) The Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America: How China makes friends and what this means for the region, Latin American Focus Group, Mar. 18 (2022). <https://blogs.eui.eu/latin-american-working-group/the-belt-and-road-initiative-in-latin-america-how-china-makes-friends-and-what-this-means-for-the-region/>.

<sup>12</sup>Mowla, W. and Bernhard, I. (2022) Why might Taiwan's allies in Latin America and the Caribbean soon look to China?, *The Global Americans*, Jan. 6 (2022). <https://theglobalamericans.org/2022/01/why-might-taiwans-allies-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-soon-look-to-china/>.

<sup>13</sup>Central Asia plays a pivotal role in Belt and Road, China Global Television Network, Jan. 24 (2022). <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-01-24/Expert-Central-Asia-plays-a-pivotal-role-in-Belt-and-Road-175z6zTUxSo/index.html>.

<sup>14</sup>Jabarkhyl, N., Oman counts on Chinese billions to build desert boomtown, *Reuters*, Sep. 5 (2017). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oman-china-investment/oman-counts-on-chinese-billions-to-build-desert-boomtown-idUSKCN1BG1WJ>.

<sup>15</sup>China issues Arab policy paper, *China Daily*, Jan. 13 (2016). [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-01/13/content\\_23075665.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-01/13/content_23075665.htm).

<sup>16</sup>Algeria's El Hamdania Port, International Trade Administration, Mar. 29 (2020). <https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/algerias-el-hamdania-port>.

Casablanca. The PRC is likely to seek BRI integration with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), allowing duty-free trade in Chinese goods, as well as taking center stage in logistics, technology, and standards [Deutsch, 2022].

Thus, through the BRI, China is creating the infrastructure to include peripheral countries in its own GVCs, which will bring Beijing closer to achieving the strategic goal of technological leadership and a place at the center of the world-system.

### US INITIATIVES

As it develops and spans a growing number of countries in the LAAC, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa, the BRI presents an increasing challenge to US interests in the areas of trade, finance, technology, and standards. As was mentioned above, this process creates the threat of a gradual “squeezing out” of American companies from peripheral and semiperipheral countries through the use of specific nonmarket mechanisms. As a result, the old American model of economic leadership is also becoming obsolete and there is a need to reconsider practices, rebuild existing ones, and create new institutions.

In previous decades, neoliberal globalization was driven by the creation of free trade areas (FTAs), which provided a complex mechanism for the exchange of goods, services, and investments, which, coupled with deregulation policies, allowed American companies to dominate the markets of peripheral countries. At the same time, recent similar projects—the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—have not been successful for the United States. The crisis of the world-system led to a decrease in the effectiveness of market integration mechanisms and the predominance of mechanisms of economic nationalism and protectionism.

In 2016, negotiations with the European Union under the TTIP were terminated. In this case, the preparation of the agreement was initially accompanied by a number of contradictions related to differences in standards, requirements for product quality, protection of manufacturers and jobs, and problems of mutual access to public procurement.

In 2017, the Trump administration on the very first day of its work announced its withdrawal from the TPP agreement signed a year earlier. Instead, in 2019, the remaining eleven countries signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (CPTPP), which basically repeated the previous version but without US participation.

The rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership did not meet with serious objections in the United States, including from Trump’s opponents. The reasons for this were similar to the withdrawal from the TTIP—the desire to protect the national market from the

threat of rising unemployment and lower wages in the United States caused by the influx of cheap goods from other FTA partner countries.<sup>17</sup> In addition, a protectionist policy that is incompatible with the principles of an FTA can also be seen as a consequence of a decrease in the profitability of the backbone companies of the central countries.

At the same time, the strategy of concluding bilateral trade agreements, which D. Trump and the Republican Party adhered to, turned out to be no less complicated. In addition, against the background of the US withdrawal from regional projects, a new free trade area was created—the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)—in which China also participates. It also included the ASEAN countries, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and Japan.

These factors led the United States to prepare an alternative base for the reintegration of its allies in the new conditions. The most important task here is the development of new norms and standards, which in the future can be applied to create a kind of American-centric global system. It should not include the PRC or other countries traditionally identified as threats to national security—North Korea, Iran, and Russia.<sup>18</sup> One of the most important tasks in this area is to create an alternative to the Chinese BRI.

As part of this goal, the first step was the launch of the Blue Dot Network (BDN) program in 2019 with Australia and Japan. Its task is to create framework norms, standards, and principles for the development of international infrastructure projects, which it will also evaluate and certify.<sup>19</sup> As conceived by the developers, this step will help attract investments and partners, as well as ensure the further development and effective functioning of the projects being created. This program is carried out in cooperation and with the technical support of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).<sup>20</sup> For several years of operation, the BDN funding amounted to \$60 billion and was provided by the US International Development Finance Corporation, created in the same year.

Two years later, the Biden administration attempted to continue the Blue Dot Network line through the Build Back Better World (B3W) initia-

<sup>17</sup>Popken, B. (2017) Why Trump killed TPP—And why it matters to you, NBC, Jan. 23 (2017). <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/economy/why-trump-killed-tpp-why-it-matters-you-n710781>.

<sup>18</sup>See Annual threat assessment of the US intelligence community, Feb. 7 (2022). <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2022-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup>Blue Dot Network, US Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/blue-dot-network/#FAQ>.

<sup>20</sup>The Blue Dot Network: A proposal for a global certification framework for quality infrastructure investment, OECD. [www.oecd.org/daf/blue-dot-network-proposal-certification.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/daf/blue-dot-network-proposal-certification.pdf).

tive,<sup>21</sup> aimed at developing countries. It was announced at the G7 summit in 2021. It was assumed that the main tasks of the B3W would be energy security and the development of green and digital technologies, as well as healthcare. In fact, the United States invited other countries of the center to take part in creating an infrastructure to strengthen their positions in the joint management of GVCs based on innovative technologies. The initiative was supposed to be provided through private investment with the support of the governments of the G7 countries. Its name was consonant with the large-scale Build Back Better plan to upgrade the American transportation infrastructure, which Congress never approved.

Further and apparently in an effort to get away from the association with the unaccepted bill, B3W was replaced by the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII). Its creation was announced at the G7 summit in 2022. Like the B3W, the partnership will focus on developing countries—mainly in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Its tasks are reduced to the creation of infrastructure, the development of “green technologies,” the promotion of norms and standards in the areas of the digital economy, entrepreneurship, healthcare, climate, and gender equality.

It is expected that the United States will be able to attract about \$200 billion to the project, initially from the federal budget (grants, state funds, and organizations) and later through private investment. In total, together with the contribution of other G7 members, PGII funding should amount to about \$600 billion by 2027.<sup>22</sup> However, by mid-2022, the amount of funds allocated was about \$3 billion, and counterparties in the recipient countries were not fully identified. It is stated that both governments and private companies will be among them.

For comparison, according to Morgan Stanley, China’s costs for the development of the BRI, which primarily implies the construction of transport infrastructure (hard infrastructure), may amount to about \$1.2–\$1.4 trillion by 2027.<sup>23</sup> By that time, creating a similar and redundant system will not be possible, and such a strategy is unlikely to make sense in the long term. As a result, the United States is faced with the task of finding alternative ways to fend off the actions

of the PRC. In this situation, the emphasis on the digital economy seems to be an effective response, since it is expected that the attention of developed countries will be focused around it [Shirov, 2022, p. 17]. The development of the relevant infrastructure can proceed at a relatively fast pace. In addition, this process will be accompanied by individual programs to improve the living standards of the populations of developing countries and to create an appropriate “soft infrastructure.” However, there are also a number of difficulties.

As was noted above, it is expected that the main costs will fall on the private sector, but for private investors the problem of return on investment is even more acute than for government investors. Since the activities of PGII will focus on developing countries, and in particular Africa, the most important issue is sovereign risks that hinder investment. The United States will have to tackle the challenge of institutional reforms in developing countries to improve the business and investment climate.

To solve these problems, the United States plans to involve the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which operates in close relationship with the State Department. It has many years of experience working with governments and the private sector in developing countries, including in promoting standards. The state-owned Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which provides direct financial support to developing countries in the form of grants, will also take part in the project. Its annual budget is about \$900 million, which is approved by Congress. The task of both organizations is likely to be to work with local governments and the private sector, to provide an enabling environment, and to attract local and foreign investors [Savoy, 2022].

Within the framework of the same task, the initiatives put forward (at least at the initial stages) are supposed to be carried out with the participation of American companies from the fields of energy, construction, and transport. In addition, government agencies—USAID, MCC, and several others—traditionally make most of their purchases from US suppliers. This feature, among other things, is due to the “Buy American” law,<sup>24</sup> on the implementation of which budgetary departments are required to report. Thus, the PGII development strategy at its initial stage is close to the PRC approaches. A significant part of BRI projects is paid from the Chinese budget, and Chinese contractors are involved in the work. However, unlike China, the US federal government cannot afford a similar cost of infrastructure development in foreign countries (\$1.2 trillion over ten years). There are also costs to the tactics of attracting private invest-

<sup>21</sup> President Biden and G7 leaders launch Build Back Better World (B3W) partnership, The White House, June 12 (2021). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership>.

<sup>22</sup> President Biden and G7 Leaders formally launch the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, The White House, June 26 (2022). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/26/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-formally-launch-the-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment/>.

<sup>23</sup> Inside China’s plan to create a modern Silk Road, Morgan Stanley, Mar. 14 (2018). <https://www.morganstanley.com/ideas/china-belt-and-road>.

<sup>24</sup> 41 US Code Chapter 83—Buy American, Legal Information Institute. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/41/subtitle-IV/chapter-83>.

ment in the PGII. It does not allow reallocation of funds between projects if necessary, and furthermore, it links the amount of incoming funds to the success of democratization and the development of local political and financial institutions.

The projects announced under the PGII can be divided into three groups: digital economy, energy, and social sphere. The first includes one of the flagship projects of the entire initiative—the laying of a telecommunications cable SEA-ME-WS 6 between Southeast Asia (Singapore), North Africa (Egypt), and Western Europe (France), which will cost \$600 million.

Another project is the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP). Its objectives are to stimulate economically sustainable and reliable private sector investments, promote regulatory reforms, and encourage the implementation of modern methods for ensuring cybersecurity and data privacy.<sup>25</sup> The latter task also includes the creation of a 5G network infrastructure, which can be seen as a countermeasure to the promotion of Chinese services in this area. The DCCP also includes a Digital Investment Program for ISPs and financial technology companies operating in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Among its tasks is support (including investment) for high-risk projects that are at the initial stages of development.

In energy and green technologies, the PGII will develop the USAID-supported Power Africa program launched in 2013, the installation of solar panels in Angola (about \$2 billion), the energy security project in Southeast Asia, and also the development and construction of a modular reactor in Romania.

In addition, the PGII envisages several social projects aimed at improving living standards in developing countries. Among them are the construction of clinics in Côte d'Ivoire, the launch of vaccine production in Senegal, support for the World Bank's project to ensure the care of children in developing countries, food safety and the development of the agricultural complex in India, and support for small and medium-sized businesses in southern Africa. In total, by mid-2022, ten programs were announced in various regions of the world with a total funding of about \$3 billion.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the PGII, the United States has stepped up its policy of creating regional interstate forums of economic cooperation with similar goals. Thus, at the end of May 2022, as part of the Asian tour of J. Biden, the creation of the Indo–Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was

announced.<sup>27</sup> It was signed by Australia, Brunei, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Japan. The IPEF implies the development of new standards of international trade, including within the digital economy; improving the reliability of supply chains and logistical efficiency; providing reliable access to raw materials, minerals, and semiconductors; development of clean energy and green technologies; and resolution of taxation problems and anticorruption measures.

In June 2022, at the Summit of the Americas in Miami, a regional project similar to the IPEF (and close to the PGII) was announced—the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP).<sup>28</sup> Its main areas are strengthening the economies of Latin America, developing regional infrastructure, improving the reliability of supply chains, introducing green energy, simplifying customs procedures, raising labor standards, settling migration, education, and health problems, and the economic empowerment of women.

At the moment, both regional projects can be characterized as informal, in which there are no specific requirements for participants. This nature of the projects is determined not only by ongoing interstate consultations on the development of action programs but also by the political situation in the United States. The presence of specific requirements and conditions obliging Washington to fulfill them may adversely affect some of the US political elites, primarily from the Republican Party. Thus, attracting private investment and creating the appropriate conditions may be the only effective approach for Washington. However, this option also has serious drawbacks. Successful management of sovereign risks cannot be guaranteed, and it also limits private capital inflows. As a consequence, the PGII may face uneven and slow development in a number of areas.

However, it is important to note that the IPEF and PAEP may be an attempt to prepare the political environment for more effective promotion of the Global Infrastructure and Investment Partnership initiative. Speaking about the strategic advantages that the United States can receive from the development of the PGII and related regional initiatives, one can note the opportunity to influence the infrastructure and tools used by agents in the digital economy. Access to its facilities, tools, and services can be regulated much more easily and quickly than transport corridors.

<sup>25</sup>Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership, US Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-023h-CD-DCCP-One-Pager-10292021-Accessible-11012021.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup>President Biden and G7 leaders formally launch the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/26/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-formally-launch-the-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment>.

<sup>27</sup>Statement on Indo–Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, The White House, May 23 (2022). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/statement-on-indo-pacific-economic-framework-for-prosperity/>.

<sup>28</sup>President Biden announces the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity, The White House, June 8 (2022). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/08/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-the-americas-partnership-for-economic-prosperity/>.

Under such conditions, the United States may be able to restrict access to certain resources for individual user countries, depending on its national interests. Furthermore, on the contrary, the ability to use the created infrastructure may imply the fulfillment of a number of specified conditions. Among current examples is the disconnection of Russian users from a number of services distributed on the Internet, ranging from entertainment media platforms to professional software.

Thus, the spread of the infrastructure that powers the digital economy can be faster and less expensive. In addition, its creation can give the United States a serious tool for economic and political influence on other countries. Such “leadership by subscription” will allow the United States to regulate and limit the interaction of third countries with the PRC, depending on the situation.

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Comparative analysis of American and Chinese infrastructure projects shows significant differences between the parties in terms of planning, implementation, and initial capabilities. With a high degree of probability, the United States will not implement programs to create transport infrastructure, seeking to duplicate existing or emerging Chinese projects.

At the same time, in the context of the fourth industrial revolution and the development of the digital economy, emphasis will be placed on the digital infrastructure. Differences in approaches to the creation of such projects come down to the principles of their financing, management, and the number of partners involved. If the PRC acts unilaterally, the United States plans to cooperate actively with the G7 countries. In addition, American partners are expected to raise significantly more funds than the United States.

The US infrastructure strategy is reactionary and aimed at curbing Chinese initiatives. The reason is that Washington has become a hostage to the mechanisms of neoliberal globalization, which are becoming less effective in the current unfavorable conditions. At the same time, attempts by the United States to create projects like China’s are facing objective difficulties. One of them is Beijing’s qualitatively different strategic planning system, which enables it to implement more effectively multiyear comprehensive strategies for socioeconomic development, including in the field of global infrastructure.

It can be assumed that, in the event of negative dynamics in the development of American projects, the United States will face the real threat of losing its status as the leader of the world-system, which will lead to intensification of the struggle for markets and resources of the periphery and will also cause a comprehensive destabilization of international relations. If this option is developed, it is possible to predict

a high probability of the militarization of the US–Chinese rivalry in various regions of the world, since militarily the United States remains much more powerful. This hypothesis is confirmed by the aggravation of a number of conflicts with indirect American participation: in Ukraine, Serbia, and Taiwan.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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## EU Anti-Russian Sanctions (Restrictive Measures): Compliance with International Law

V. V. Voynikov<sup>a,b,#</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Moscow, Russia

<sup>b</sup>Kant Baltic Federal University, Kaliningrad, Russia

e-mail: [voinicov@yandex.ru](mailto:voinicov@yandex.ru)

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**Abstract**—The EU sanctions policy against Russia began back in 2014 as a response to the aggravation of the crisis in Ukraine. In 2022, sanctions (restrictive measures) against Russia were significantly strengthened and acquired a large-scale and unpredictable character. The purpose of this article is to identify the essential characteristics of the EU anti-Russian sanctions and to determine the legal nature of the sanctions, as well as their compliance with international law. It is concluded that the unilateral EU sanctions, contrary to their purpose, are intended to punish Russia by causing maximum damage. International law does not forbid states and their associations to impose unilateral restrictive measures in the economic sphere if they are justified by security considerations. In this context, the verification of the validity of the EU sanctions should be assessed individually for each measure. The author believes that a number of EU restrictive measures taken against the Russian Federation go beyond the scope of the permissions established by international law. This is especially true regarding measures taken in 2022. Moreover, the practice of implementing the adopted restrictive measures is becoming increasingly sophisticated, indicating that the European Union and its individual members are abusing their position.

**Keywords:** restrictive measures, sanctions, Russia, European Union, international law, common foreign and security policy

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### INTRODUCTION

International law understands sanctions as coercive measures applied in case of refusal of a subject of international law to fulfill its international legal obligations [Meshcheryakova, 2017, p. 32]. The adoption of international sanctions is provided, in particular, by Article 41 of the UN Charter.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, initially sanctions were considered as a measure of coercion on the part of bodies authorized by the international community toward certain states that violate the norms of international law. In other words, in this case international sanctions were meant. However, subsequently the practice of applying sanctions was expanded significantly, and this instrument was adopted by other, unauthorized, entities. Therefore, along with international sanctions, unilateral coercive measures began to appear. Consequently, in modern international relations, two groups of coercive measures can be found, depending on the subject of application, which Yu.N. Zhdanov qualifies as counter-

measures (horizontal measures), applied by states, and sanctions (vertical measures), established by international organizations [Zhdanov, 1999, p. 10].

### LEGAL BASIS FOR THE EU SANCTIONS POLICY

The European Union has the competence to implement its own sanctions policy. For the first time, the European Union applied sanctions in the spring of 1994 after the Maastricht Treaty had entered into force [Giumelli et al., 2022].

The legal lexicon of the European Union does not contain the concept of a sanction, primary and secondary EU law using the concept of *restrictive measures*; however, in both ordinary and scientific language [Timofeev, 2021; Zelyova, 2021], as well as in the political lexicon and even in soft law acts, the concept of *sanctions* is used quite widely as a synonym for *restrictive measures*.

As part of the EU sanctions policy, it is necessary to single out international sanctions (restrictive measures), taken in pursuance of UN Security Council resolutions, as well as unilateral sanctions, adopted by the European Union independently, in the absence of

<sup>#</sup>Vadim Valentinovich Voynikov, Dr. Sci. (Law) is a Professor in the Department of European Law at MGIMO University.

<sup>1</sup>UN Charter. <https://www.un.org/ru/about-us/un-charter/full-text>. Cited June 28, 2022.

an appropriate international legal basis, i.e., acting as unilateral or autonomous sanctions [Borlini and Silingardi, 2018]. The adoption of unilateral sanctions indicates an increase in the autonomization of the policy of applying restrictive measures [Abdullin and Keshner, 2021, p. 73].

In general terms, unilateral sanctions are measures taken by states, groups of states, or regional organizations without the consent of or bypassing the UN Security Council, not in accordance with the international obligations of the sanctioning entity, in order to change the policy or behavior of another state; to achieve its subordination in the implementation of its sovereign rights; to secure advantages of any kind; or to warn, coerce, or punish a state on which the sanctions have been imposed.<sup>2</sup>

The main difference between international and unilateral sanctions is that a state, joining the UN Charter, recognizes the authority of the UN Security Council to take sanctions measures, i.e., agrees that sanctions could theoretically be imposed on this state itself. With regard to unilateral sanctions of the European Union and other subjects of international law, the object of the sanctions policy does not recognize the authority of the relevant subject to apply certain restrictive measures against this state or its individuals or legal entities. Within the framework of the EU sanctions policy, a number of distinctive features can be identified.

First, sanctions (restrictive measures) are always collective in nature; i.e., they are adopted not at the level of specific states but at the level of the entire Union and are subject to application by all EU countries. Moreover, a feature of the EU sanctions policy is the involvement in this policy of third states that are not members of the European Union but are invited to join the adopted restrictive measures by adopting restrictions similar in content [Hellquist, 2016]. This applies in particular to EU candidate countries, which are encouraged to regularly join the measures taken at the EU level [Szép and Van Elsuwege, 2020, p. 7].

Second, EU restrictive measures are limited in terms of time; they are taken, as a rule, for a period of six months and are subject to regular review to assess their effectiveness.

Third, at the moment, the restrictive measures of the European Union do not have the extraterritorial effect, which, in particular, is typical of the US sanctions policy. This means that restrictive EU measures are mandatory for all entities whose personal law is EU law [Panov, 2022, p. 143].

Fourth, EU law provides for a system of legal protection for individuals and legal entities subject to sanctions.

<sup>2</sup> Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights UN, A/76/174/Rev.1, Sep. 13 (2021). <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/245/78/PDF/N2124578.pdf?OpenElement>. Cited August 22, 2022.

In accordance with Article 263 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as TFEU), the EU Court of Justice examines the legality of legislative acts and acts of the EU Council. According to the general procedure (Article 275 TFEU), the EU Court of Justice does not have the power to review the legality of Council acts adopted in the framework of the common foreign and security policy. However, this rule does not apply to claims of individuals and legal entities for the revision of restrictive measures. This means that decisions and regulations of the Council on the introduction of restrictive measures can be challenged in court on claims of interested individuals and legal entities.

At the same time, even in the case of contesting EU acts on the application of sanctions, the EU Court has limited competence [Entin, 2016, p. 95] since in fact it considers only issues related to the observance of the rights of individuals and legal entities, but not the validity of the sanctions themselves. In the Rosneft judgment C-72/15,<sup>3</sup> the court has repeatedly pointed out that the Council has a wide discretion in determining the purpose of the restrictive measures (paras. 88, 132). In other words, the court has no right to intervene either in issues of the validity of the imposition of sanctions or in issues of their specific content.

Based on the principles contained in the Guidelines for the implementation and evaluation of restrictive measures (sanctions) within the framework of the common foreign and security policy,<sup>4</sup> restrictive measures (sanctions) can be defined as measures applied by the Council within the framework of the common foreign and security policy in relation to certain states, organizations, and citizens for the purpose of changing the policies or activities of a given state, part of a state, government, organizations, or individuals in accordance with the EU foreign policy objectives set out in Article 21 TFEU.

The legal basis for the adoption of EU sanctions is Article 29 of the Treaty on the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU), as well as Article 215 TFEU. In accordance with the current EU legislation, the adoption of sanctions is carried out in two stages. In the first stage, the Council decides within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in accordance with Article 29 TEU.

At the second stage, the measures provided for by the above decision are put into effect either at the EU level or at the national level [Giumelli et al., 2022, p. 36].

<sup>3</sup> C-72/15. Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of March 28, 2017. PJSC Rosneft Oil Company v Her Majesty's Treasury and Others. <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?num=C-72/15>. Cited June 28, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Guidelines on Implementation and Evaluation of Restrictive Measures (Sanctions) in the Framework of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, Brussels, May 4, 2018. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5664-2018-INIT/en/pdf>. Cited June 22, 2022.

By virtue of Article 24 TEU, any decisions taken under the CFSP require unanimity. Consequently, at the first stage, the decision to introduce restrictive measures is taken on the basis of consensus. In addition, such decisions are not formally legislative acts, but they are a necessary condition for the adoption of the relevant regulations that make up the legislation of the European Union. For the adoption of regulations in the second stage, the principle of a qualified majority is used. However, the adoption of such regulations is of a technical nature since they actually reproduce the provisions contained in decisions taken on the basis of unanimity.

Thus, the mechanism for implementing the sanctions policy is based on both the international legal and supranational components of the European Union [Meshcheryakova, 2018, p. 19].

As stated in the judgement of the EU court in the Rosneft case, the legal acts adopted at the two above levels have different functions: the decision declares the position of the European Union in relation to the restrictive measures to be taken, while the regulation is a document enacting these measures at the EU level (para. 90).

#### EU SANCTIONS POLICY IN RELATION TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

There are currently three types of EU sanctions against Russia.

The first type is individual sanctions against specific citizens and organizations guilty, according to the European Union, of violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The first package of individual sanctions was adopted on March 17, 2014.<sup>5</sup>

The second type of sanctions are restrictive measures against Crimea and Sevastopol, which were adopted on June 23, 2014, in response to the accession and full integration of the peninsula into Russia.<sup>6</sup>

The third type is anti-Russian economic sanctions imposed on July 31, 2014, after the crash of the Malaysian Boeing.<sup>7</sup>

After the recognition of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the Lugansk People's Republic (LPR) and the start of hostilities by the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, the European Union significantly expanded anti-Russian economic sanctions, as a result of which, in addition to the exist-

ing economic restrictive measures, seven packages of sanctions were adopted (as of August 2022), providing for significant restrictions on transport, trade, visa policy, banking, energy, etc. [Potemkina, 2022].

However, the restrictive measures adopted in 2022 are not an independent type of sanctions; they are part of the economic anti-Russian sanctions adopted in July 2014. All types of restrictive measures are taken for a period of six months and are subject to extension in accordance with the same procedure that applies to their adoption.

As mentioned above, formally, the EU sanctions are a preventive tool that does not have the character of punishment. However, restrictive measures against Russia were taken in violation of this approach. In other words, the sanctions were introduced not as a preventive measure but as a punishment for Russia's policy.

This, in particular, is evidenced by the preamble of Council Regulation (EU) no. 833/2014, which explicitly states that restrictive measures are taken "with a view to increasing the costs of Russia's actions to undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence and to promoting a peaceful settlement of the crisis." Consequently, the main goal of the restrictive measures is not to change the policy of Russia but to punish it. Note that the specified goal, namely, to increase the costs of Russia for its actions to violate the sovereignty of Ukraine, was repeatedly pointed out by the EU court in the framework of the Rosneft case.

Initially, the European Union adhered to the concept of targeted sanctions [Timofeev, 2021, p. 21], the essence of which is that the greatest effect of sanctions should be aimed directly at decision makers and associated persons, but at the same time should minimally affect the population of the country [Zhbankov et al., 2015, p. 245]. However, the application of a new wave of sanctions against Russia in 2022 in connection with the start of the Russian military operation on the territory of Ukraine indicates that the European Union has moved away from the concept of targeted sanctions. The new restrictive measures adopted in 2022 are non-selective since they are aimed at causing maximum damage to Russia and, with it, to its entire population.

#### COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW

One of the key issues of the EU sanctions policy is the problem of correlation with the norms of international law. In the Russian scientific literature and information space, the point of view prevails according to which the restrictive measures of the European Union against the Russian Federation are illegal [Vlasov, 2016]. However, to determine the legality of restrictive measures, it is necessary to analyze not the sanctions policy as a whole, but just specific measures. In other words, the question of the legality of certain

<sup>5</sup> Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP of March 17, 2014, concerning restrictive measures with respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence of Ukraine. OJ L 78, 17.3.2014, pp. 16–21.

<sup>6</sup> Council Decision 2014/386/CFSP of 23 June 2014 concerning restrictions on goods originating in Crimea or Sevastopol, in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol OJ L 183, 24.6.2014, pp. 70, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine. OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, pp. 13–17.

measures should be decided on the basis of an individual assessment.

It is quite obvious that individual sanctions related to the ban on entry into the EU countries by specific individuals do not contradict the requirements of either international law or internal EU law.

Regarding economic sanctions, the situation is different. The European Union is linked with Russia by a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements, including the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement<sup>8</sup> (hereinafter referred to as PCA), WTO agreements, etc.

In considering the preliminary request of the High Court of London in the Rosneft case, the EU Court of Justice noted that the current PCA does not exclude the possibility of applying unilateral restrictive measures since, according to Article 99, nothing in this Agreement prevents one of the Parties from taking any measures that it considers necessary to protect its essential security interests. In doing so, the Court considered that, given the Council's wide discretion in this area, this body could conclude that the adoption of restrictive measures was necessary to protect the fundamental security interests of the European Union and to maintain peace and international security (para. 116).

Note that similar provisions for the essential interests and security clause are found in GATT 1947 (Article XXI)<sup>9</sup> and GATS (Article XIV bis).<sup>10</sup>

However, the presence of the clause on the protection of essential interests and security does not mean that the EU anti-Russian sanctions are in line with international law.

First, no international legal act authorizes the European Union to recognize another state as guilty of violating international law and to apply measures of responsibility to such a state.

Second, the current international law does not deprive states or integration associations of applying protective restrictive measures of an economic nature, including to ensure their security. Regarding the situation under consideration, there was no immediate threat to the security of the European Union. Moreover, the EU countries themselves are actively involved in the conflict in Ukraine and, accordingly, are also responsible for the aggravation of the crisis.

<sup>8</sup> The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement establishing a partnership between the Russian Federation, on the one hand, and the European Communities and their Member States, on the other hand. Corfu, June 24, 1994. [https://russiaeu.ru/user-files/file/partnership\\_and\\_cooperation\\_agreement\\_1997\\_russian.pdf](https://russiaeu.ru/user-files/file/partnership_and_cooperation_agreement_1997_russian.pdf). Cited August 22, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947). <https://wto.ru/about-WTO/WTO-agreements/>. Cited August 22, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> General Agreement on Trade in Services. <https://wto.ru/about-WTO/WTO-agreements/>. Cited August 22, 2022.

Third, the nature of the restrictive EU measures, especially those adopted in 2022, makes it possible to conclude that a significant part of them go beyond the complete or partial suspension or reduction of economic and financial relations. In general, these measures are aimed at causing maximum economic and political damage to the Russian Federation. This clearly contradicts both EU law and the current principles of international law. In this regard, the restrictive measures taken in 2022 are more likely not economic but punitive.

In addition, measures such as freezing the assets of the Russian Federation and its individuals and legal entities, as well as their possible subsequent withdrawal, are clearly in conflict with the fundamental principles of modern law.

Of particular concern are the actions of the EU countries to restrict the transit of goods from the main part of the territory of Russia to the territory of Kaliningrad oblast. In June 2022, Lithuania notified the Russian authorities about its ban on the transit through its territory of goods that fell under restrictive measures. Later, the Commission prepared clarifications<sup>11</sup> for member states on the application of restrictive measures in terms of "Kaliningrad transit." According to these clarifications, the restrictions introduced do not prevent the transit of sanctioned goods transported by rail; such transit can be carried out under certain conditions. From the legal point of view, this document does not have legal force; nevertheless, it allowed a partial solution to the problem. However, in any case, the restriction of transit is clearly illegal.

First, freedom of transit is guaranteed by Article V of the GATT 1947.

Second, in accordance with Article 12 of the PCA, the parties (Russia, the European Union, and all member states) agree that the principle of freedom of transit is an essential condition for achieving the objectives of this Agreement.

Third, the ban on the transit of goods is not provided for by the EU regulations on the introduction of restrictive measures. In particular, in accordance with Regulation no. 833/2014 (as amended by Regulation no. 2022/576), there is a ban on the purchase, import, and transfer of certain types of goods; however, based on the literal interpretation of the relevant rules, there is no ban on the transit of goods, especially since they move from one part of the Russian Federation to another. In this regard, restrictions on cargo transit to Kaliningrad oblast are the result of a loose interpretation of the provisions of EU legal acts (excessive

<sup>11</sup> Guidance to EU Member States. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/business\\_economy\\_euro/banking\\_and\\_finance/documents/faqs-sanctions-russia-export-import-guidance\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/business_economy_euro/banking_and_finance/documents/faqs-sanctions-russia-export-import-guidance_en_0.pdf). Cited August 22, 2022.

enforcement of sanctions),<sup>12</sup> as well as international legal obligations.

In addition, the issues of freight and passenger transit were specifically agreed upon by Russia and the European Union in the Joint Statement of April 11, 2002,<sup>13</sup> as well as the Joint Statement of April 27, 2004, on the issue of EU enlargement.<sup>14</sup> These statements refer to acts of soft law; however, they provided for specific legal procedures that were carried out by the parties.

It is necessary to raise on a separate basis the issue of restrictions in the field of air transport, namely the ban on the supply of aircraft and other aviation equipment, as well as the ban on the use of airspace. The Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation of 1944<sup>15</sup> provides for the possibility, under exceptional circumstances, or during a state of emergency, or in the interests of public safety, to temporarily restrict or prohibit flights over its entire territory (Article 9). However, the provisions of the Convention are based on the principle of nondiscrimination, i.e., any rules regarding admission to its territory and release of aircraft shall apply to aircraft of all Contracting States without distinction (Articles 9, 11). Thus, here one can also see a violation of existing norms of international law.

Moreover, a ban on the use of airspace, as well as measures to ban the supply of aircraft and spare parts, creates risks for flight safety and aviation security and leads to increased flight time, higher fuel consumption, and, accordingly, an increase in the negative impact on the environment.

As part of the sanctions policy against Russia, significant funds were frozen, as well as property belonging to the Russian Federation and to private entities. Almost immediately after the freezing of assets, EU and Ukrainian politicians began to make proposals not just to freeze assets but to forcibly seize them. Of course, such ideas came into conflict with the key provisions of modern international and national law, as well as the principle of inviolability of private property.

On May 25, 2022, the Commission prepared the first package of draft laws aimed at legalizing the mechanism for seizing property and funds from indi-

viduals subject to sanctions. The essence of this mechanism is as follows. The European Union intends to criminalize acts related to the violation of the sanctions regime and, as one of the punishments, to provide for liability in the form of confiscation of property and funds.

Currently, criminal law is the responsibility of the EU member states, but Article 83 (1) TFEU gives the Union the power to harmonize criminal law in relation to particularly serious crimes of a cross-border nature. The list of crimes is defined in Article 83 (1) TFEU, however, by virtue of this provision, based on the development of crime and unanimity, the Council may decide to expand the specified list.

To achieve this goal, the Commission has prepared a draft decision of the Council, providing for the inclusion of violations of the EU sanctions regime among the most serious types of crimes of a cross-border nature<sup>16</sup> (Article 83 (1) TFEU). At the same time, the Commission prepared a draft directive on confiscation,<sup>17</sup> which defines the mechanism for tracing, identification, confiscation, and administration of property in criminal proceedings. To complete the creation of a mechanism for the withdrawal of funds, it is also necessary to adopt a directive on the harmonization of criminal liability for violation of EU restrictive measures.<sup>18</sup>

In analyzing the proposed scheme, note that formally the mechanism for bringing to criminal liability for violation of restrictive measures and confiscation of property as a criminal punishment is consistent with existing practice. However, if we consider this situation as a whole, we will see that in essence this mechanism acts as the legalization of the illegal seizure of private property. After all, the condition for the onset of criminal liability is the fault of the person concerned.

In the situation under consideration, individuals acquire property in the European Union within the framework of the current national legislation and use it without violating local laws. Further, in the absence of any guilty actions on their part, the European Union imposes restrictions on this property, excluding

<sup>12</sup>Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights UN, A/76/174/Rev.1, Sep. 13 (2021). <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/245/78/PDF/N2124578.pdf?OpenElement>. Cited August 22, 2022.

<sup>13</sup>Joint statement of the Russian Federation and the European Union on transit between Kaliningrad oblast and the rest of the territory of the Russian Federation, Nov. 11 (2002). <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/3537>. Cited June 22, 2022.

<sup>14</sup>Joint statement on EU Enlargement and EU–Russia relations, April 27, 2004, 8664/04 (Presse 122). [https://russiaeu.ru/user-files/file/joint\\_statement\\_on\\_eu\\_enlargement\\_and\\_russia\\_eu\\_relations\\_2004\\_english.pdf](https://russiaeu.ru/user-files/file/joint_statement_on_eu_enlargement_and_russia_eu_relations_2004_english.pdf). Cited August 22, 2022.

<sup>15</sup>Convention on International Civil Aviation, Chicago, 1944. [https://doc.mil.ru/documents/quick\\_search/more.htm?id=11911636@egNPA](https://doc.mil.ru/documents/quick_search/more.htm?id=11911636@egNPA). Cited June 20, 2022.

<sup>16</sup>Proposal for a Council Decision on adding the violation of Union restrictive measures to the areas of crime laid down in Article 83 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Brussels, 25.5.2022, COM(2022) 247 final. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/1\\_191743\\_prop\\_dec\\_cri\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/1_191743_prop_dec_cri_en.pdf). Cited May 25, 2022.

<sup>17</sup>Proposal for a Directive of the Parliament and of the Council on asset recovery and confiscation, Brussels, 25.5.2022, COM(2022) 245 final. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/proposal-directive-asset-recovery-and-confiscation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/proposal-directive-asset-recovery-and-confiscation_en). Cited May 25, 2022.

<sup>18</sup>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council towards a Directive on criminal penalties for the violation of Union restrictive measures, Brussels, May 25, 2022, COM(2022) 249 final. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2\\_191746\\_comm\\_cri\\_ann\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2_191746_comm_cri_ann_en.pdf). Cited May 25, 2022.

the possibility of its use. In the event of an attempt to exercise the rights of the owner in relation to his/her own property, that person may be held criminally liable, and the property confiscated. It is unlikely that such a situation can be justified from the standpoint of a modern legal state.

In addition, in modern law, confiscation as a type of criminal punishment is applied to property that was acquired illegally as a result of a crime or acted as an instrument of crime. However, in this case, the legitimacy of the origin of property and funds subject to confiscation is likely to have no legal significance. Thus, the proposed mechanism for the seizure of property significantly undermines the principle of the rule of law, which is a key value and achievement of European integration.

### CONCLUSIONS

The restrictive measures of the European Union by their nature act as sanctions since they are a means of punishment. However, from the legal point of view, they are not such since they are unilateral restrictive measures taken in accordance with the internal law of the European Union.

Even though the norms of international law, including WTO law, do not exclude the possibility of applying measures of an economic nature to other countries for security reasons, the restrictive measures of the European Union against the Russian Federation cannot be qualified as fully consistent with both international law and legal norms of the European Union itself. The legality of each EU sanctions measure needs to be checked on an individual basis for compliance with international law and commitments.

Regardless of the nature of the assessment of the actions of the Russian Federation in the framework of the military operation on the territory of Ukraine, most of the EU anti-Russian economic sanctions do not comply with international law and are inherently irrational and counterproductive. The application of sanctions measures in their current form, together with active arms deliveries before and after the outbreak of the hostilities, turned out to be the least effective means to ensure peace.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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## The Visegrád Countries against the Background of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict

L. N. Shishelina<sup>#</sup>

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

*e-mail: l.shishelina@gmail.com*

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**Abstract**—An attempt is made to analyze the origins of the attitude of Central European countries to the current military conflict in Ukraine, as well as their historical fears and concerns that broke out against the background of Moscow’s proposals to return the European security system to the contours of 1997, which preceded the armed invasion on February 24, 2022. It was historical memory that largely formed the knowingly predictable position of these countries in the conflict and their unconditional support of the Ukrainian side. According to the author, the conflict overall contributed to the pro-Atlantic consolidation of the Central European region, deepened the gap in relations with Russia, and produced new nuances in relations within the Visegrád region. Nevertheless, the understanding of the importance of regional solidarity, strengthened over 30 years of democratic development, keeps the Visegrád Group countries together, preventing them from falling victim one by one to any of the modern geopolitical poles. In defining the events, particularly the essence of the military conflict in Ukraine, the author adheres to the terminology used in the political space of the region under analysis, which allows her to remain objective in describing what is happening.

**Keywords:** Visegrád Group, military conflict in Ukraine, refugees, humanitarian aid, military aid

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The opinion of the Central European countries about the current events in Ukraine could well be expected by the Russian and world political elite. It was easy to calculate about 40 years ago, long before the beginning of the reform of socialist societies. It was then, in the mid-1980s, that the intellectuals’ meaningful opportunist movement was felt in this part of Europe, once again after the events of 1956, 1968, and 1980, which favored the search for an exit to the free European expanse. No doubt, the impetus to the emergence of numerous scientific works and philosophical essays on the topic of the European community and humanity was given by the reforms of M. Gorbachev, who came to power in Moscow in the mid-1980s. That euphoric period, which lasted until 1993, was the climax in the real mutual sympathies between the Russian and Central European peoples, determined by the liberation revolutionary movement. However, the romanticism in the relations came to an end quite soon, when the world saw footage of the tanks shooting the building of the Supreme Council in the center of the Russian capital. This event made Hungarians, Poles, Czechoslovaks, and others involved in building new societies recall similar pic-

tures on the streets of Budapest, Prague, and Bratislava in Eastern Europe. On the crest of these reminiscences, one after another, the states of Central Europe began to submit requests to join NATO and the European Union, where they were respectively accepted after long accommodations and negotiations with Moscow in 1999 and 2004. This was why the Russian proposal put forward in the winter of 2021/2022 to return the contours of European security to those of 1997 was perceived in the countries of the Visegrád Group as unrealistic and inadequate, to say the least. For these countries, it would mean their withdrawal from the EU and NATO and leaving them in an ambiguous status, which they had assessed as dangerous back in the early 1990s.

### PROLOGUE OF THE CONFLICT: ATTITUDE TO RUSSIA’S PROPOSALS

Thus, the attitude of the political and intellectual strata of these countries to Moscow began to deteriorate long before the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. We will not appeal to the time of the mass mutual expulsion of diplomats in 2021 and beyond, but at least a few months before February 24, after Russia’s demands on NATO had been voiced, the relations practically collapsed. One can only regret the time when the Czechs did not allow the United States

<sup>#</sup> Lyubov’ Nikolaevna Shishelina, Dr. Sci. (Hist.), works in the Department of Central and Eastern European Studies at the RAS Institute of Europe.

to deploy elements of the American missile defense system on their territory (the last such proposal was made in August 2020) [Shishelina, 2021]. Meanwhile, immediately after the signal from Moscow, even Slovakia signed a previously unthinkable agreement with the United States, which caused a mixed reaction from the opposition.

The Visegrád countries met the proposals to return Europe to the security contours of 1997 with surprise and great concern about their security. According to Polish analysts, Russia meant the 14 countries that had joined NATO after 1997, including Poland, which, together with the Czech Republic and Hungary, became a member of NATO in 1999. This provided a good opportunity to appreciate the benefits of membership in a body for the collective defense of security: “The countries of the North Atlantic Alliance consider the demands of Russia unacceptable and emphasize that Moscow has no veto power on these issues,”<sup>1</sup> Poland and neighboring Central European countries responded.

Politicians and scientists were at variance concerning what could have caused such an inadequate reaction—external or internal factors. There have been many assumptions. As M. Świerczyński, a security analyst for the Polish newspaper *Polityka Insight*, wrote in his commentaries, the Russian proposal expressed, in essence, the sum of all Russian fears related to the expansion and strengthening of NATO, including in response to threats created by Russia itself. In his opinion, Russia wants to cancel in one motion the entire geopolitical revolution, which required 30 years of effort, colossal costs, sacrifices, and sometimes even risk from tens of millions of people. Russia called this revolution the greatest misfortune of the 20th century back 20 years ago and continues its attempts to stop and reverse it, either by force, as in Georgia and Ukraine, or otherwise, as now in negotiations with the United States and NATO [Świerczyński, 2021].

In addition, the Polish analyst noted that the document submitted for consideration “does not mention a word about restrictions on the number and deployment of troops, their equipping with offensive weapons, nor the scale and frequency of exercises on the Russian side.” Drawing attention to the complete isolation of the Russian proposal from modern European realities, he assessed it as nothing more than “an attempt to impose a declaration on NATO’s self-development on the eastern flank” and “an unsuitable condition for flight.”

<sup>1</sup> Rosja chce wyprowadzenia wojsk NATO z państw przyjętych do Sojuszu po 1997 roku, Jan. 21 (2022). [https://www.radiopik.pl/3,98137,rosja-chce-wyprowadzenia-wojsk-nato-z-panstw-prz](https://www.radiopik.pl/3,98137,rosja-chce-wyprowadzenia-wojsk-nato-z-panstw-prz;); Rosja przedstawia warunki Zachodowi, Jeden dotyczy m.in. Polski, Dec. 17 (2021). <https://www.rp.pl/dyplomacja/art19208061-rosja-przedstawia-warunki-zachodowi-jeden-dotyczy-m-in-polski>. Cited September 18, 2022.

The proposal to return to the provisions of 1997 caused approximately the same reaction of rejection in all countries that had joined NATO after that date. It became clear that there would be no negotiations under such conditions posed by Russia; however, as junior members of the alliance, the countries of Central Europe continued to wait for several months for a reaction from Washington and concrete steps from its side, simultaneously expressing surprise at the very fact of the appearance of such a document: “It is difficult to assume that the Russians do not understand this and produce printed paper only to wave it in front of the cameras,” wrote Polish newspapers [Świerczyński, 2021].

At the same time, they put forward versions about the reasons for the appearance of such a document at that very moment, when the persistent movement of Russian troops near the eastern border of Ukraine was already causing great tension. Among those versions, many political scientists singled out the subordination of foreign policy to the internal narrative. According to this model, the addressee of this project was not NATO at all but the internal public opinion of Russia, which was expected to take a fancy for such an attempt to “make a fool” of the West and demonstrate the determination to reverse the unfavorable, from the point of view of imperial Russia, course of events of the last quarter of a century [Świerczyński, 2021].

However, drawing attention to the time when the document appeared, on Christmas eve, a special time for Europe, the author dwells on the unsettling foreboding that it was just a procedure to mask the true intentions of the Kremlin.

A. Legucka, an expert at the Institute of International Affairs, tends to similar conclusions when analyzing Moscow’s proposals [Legucka, 2021]. In an analytical report dated December 15, 2021, she wrote that “by making largely unrealistic demands, Russia wants to undermine NATO, divide the allies (especially on the issue of NATO expansion to the east), weaken their cooperation (primarily the military one with Ukraine), and, if possible, gain indirect influence on the decision-making processes of the allies.” She sees Russia’s main goal as setting up a political process that, under the best scenario, would allow it to launch a new conference on European security.

During such negotiations (for example, involving Russia, the United States, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and France), Russia will seek to adopt a legally binding agreement. The concept of the indivisibility of security promoted by Russia can be seen as an attempt to impose an international order based on cooperation between superpowers (concert of superpowers), in which other states have in practice a limited right to pursue an independent foreign and security policy.

This is exactly what worries the Central European countries, which do not want to fall into the same trap

of comprehensive dependence from which they got out 30 years ago. At the same time, the Polish expert saw in Russia's demands a deliberate presentation of unacceptable proposals aimed at showing "that the West's refusal to enter into a dialogue on the Russian proposals will lead to the justification of the 'preemptive' use of military force against Ukraine." Thus, the Polish expert community viewed Moscow's proposals as nothing more but blackmail to increase the willingness of Western partners to enter into a dialogue with Russia on issues "which were seen as the foundations of the legal and political order in Europe after 1989 (or may simply serve as a justification for military action against Ukraine)."

Under these conditions, the analyst believes, Poland could point out that engaging in a dialogue with Russia on the terms it proposed would be extremely detrimental to European security since it would divide Europe into zones of privileged super-power interests.

The conflict was brewing on the eve of the Czech Republic's accession to the presidency of the EU Council, so Czech analysts treated what was happening with special attention. Like their Polish colleagues, they viewed Moscow's proposal as a kind of request from Russian officials to NATO for "security guarantees," "which mainly concern the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Namely, we mean a 'return' to the position before 1997, that is, before the countries of Central Europe, including the Czech Republic, joined NATO" [Svoboda, 2022].

Back in January, regarding the clearly escalating situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border, the Czech media called Moscow's proposal "staking everything" in order to increase rates and put pressure on the West, the European Union, and NATO.<sup>2</sup>

According to an expert from the European Values Center for Security Policy, the Russian President put forward absolutely unacceptable and unrealistic demands on the North Atlantic Alliance, such as the withdrawal of the alliance forces from Romania and Bulgaria or a return to the situation of 1997, that is, before its expansion at the expense of post-communist countries, including the Czech Republic: "Any country has the right to join any alliance, and Russia must respect this."<sup>3</sup> Among the versions of why the Kremlin needs this, two were noted. The first is the desire of the Russian leader to retain power in the face of a decline in popularity, and the second is the desire to push transit countries out of control over oil and gas flows.

K. Svoboda from Charles University recalls that the Russian President does not fall out of the ranks of

Russian rulers who were afraid of revolutions. "Vladimir Putin relatively recently admitted his negative attitude to Lenin as a revolutionary who had turned a centralized state into a confederation, where nations even got the right to leave it." Thus, the modern struggle against revolutions is nothing that Russia has not experienced in the past. There is nothing illogical in this because in countries where governments do not change through elections, there is no other way to replace a bad government with another one [Svoboda, 2022].

Since the Czech Republic was to take the chair of the high European Assembly, most experts, proceeding from the experience of 2014, proposed to start introducing preventive sanctions [Svoboda, 2022].

In fact, the Czech presidency of the EU Council began when the hostilities in Ukraine were already in full swing and there was no time to retreat. Czech politicians declared that they would dedicate their presidency to helping Ukraine on a Europe-wide scale. The crisis made it necessary to adjust the program to the changed political situation. Under these conditions, V. Havel's value rhetoric about conscience in politics and the world's fate gained new momentum and acquired additional meaning [Vedernikov, 2022]. The main priorities announced by Prague in June 2022 were the following: (1) resolving the migration crisis caused by the influx of Ukrainian refugees into the EU and the postwar reconstruction of Ukraine; (2) energy security; (3) strengthening European defense capability and cybersecurity; (4) strategic recovery of the European economy; and (5) support for democratic institutions [Program, 2022]. The developers of the program of the Czech presidency called for decisive action based on universal values and the common destiny of European peoples. Although the presidency program contained five priorities, the speech of Prime Minister P. Fiala on July 1, 2022, made it clear that only two of them were prevailing, namely, the Ukrainian issue and the achievement of EU energy independence [Vedernikov, 2022].

Moscow's demands to go 25 years back caused a mixed reaction even in Hungary, which at first shied away from direct accusations against Moscow in unleashing the conflict in Ukraine, although they sounded with might and main in politicians' speeches designed for domestic audiences and those in Brussels. Expert circles assessed the hidden meaning of Moscow's proposal in almost the same way. One of the political analysts [Rácz, 2022] predicted back in January 2022 that, despite the recognition of the fact that Russians and Ukrainians had been shooting at each other for eight years, now the likelihood of an escalation was greater than ever. A. Rácz rightly emphasized that "diplomacy has little chance now. Russia has put forward unrealistic and impracticable demands. Among other things, it wants NATO to retreat beyond the borders of 1997, which would also

<sup>2</sup> Rusko hraje vabank: Je čas obrátit role a uvalit preventivní sankce, navrhuje analytik Stulík, Rozhlas, Jan. 21 (2022). <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/rusko-hraje-vabank-je-cas-obratit-role-a-uvalit-preventivni-sankce-navrhuje-8665125>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

mean the withdrawal of Hungary from membership in NATO, which Hungary joined in 1999.” He assessed the Kremlin’s proposal rather as an attempt to justify a possible military conflict. However, he suggested that “this war will most likely remain a Ukrainian–Russian bilateral war, it will not spread to the territory of Hungary, and the Hungarian soldier will certainly not have to fight. However, if a war breaks out in our neighborhood, we will feel its indirect consequences in Hungary.”

It is noteworthy that, just as during the war in neighboring Yugoslavia in 1999, the Hungarians were distinguished by their concern about the fate of the Transcarpathian Hungarians, who could either volunteer for the Ukrainian army or be called up there.

Thus, not a single Central European country supported Moscow’s proposals to return the configuration of European security to 1979. On the contrary, they perceived these proposals as a threat to their own and regional security, forcing them to rally around NATO, which was also evidenced by the steps of Finland and Sweden—countries much more independent in their history.

Such a reaction from these countries was but natural. A year before, relations with the Czech Republic had been spoiled before this state was awarded the status of “unfriendly”; modern Russia’s relations with Poland had not worked out before, and now they turned almost into hostile ones. In the summer of 2022, Slovakia also entered the status of unfriendly.

If, when preparing the document, the possible reaction of the addressees of the message had been considered, the position of these countries on Crimea should have also been taken into account, i.e., their position after the tragic events on the Maidan in 2014, when they divided among themselves the spheres of assistance to neighboring Ukraine and helped this neighboring country for eight years. Thus, from the point of view of analyzing the international situation, Russia should initially have been ready for the sharpest reaction from the Visegrád countries regarding its forthcoming actions in Ukraine. Politicians in Central Europe followed closely the course of events, but no one expected that the tension, which had been steadily growing over the past two years, would result in the “operation” of the Russian armed forces on the territory of the neighboring state on February 24, 2022.

#### THE POSITION OF THE VISEGRÁD GROUP

Against the backdrop of obvious international aggravation, a unique situation was created, when the Visegrád Group, chaired by Hungary until June 1, 2022, initially reacted very sluggishly to the military confrontation in its neighborhood. Unlike even the crisis of fall 2021 on the Polish–Belarusian border [Shishelina, 2021], it formulated fewer joint statements than during the confrontation with Minsk. Per-

haps this was to some extent predetermined by the position taken by Hungary. Since the first days to the present, Budapest has been tirelessly declaring its desire, on the one hand, to remain out of military confrontation and, on the other, its interest in the soonest end of the most serious military conflict in Eastern Europe since the Second World War. As for the first position of V. Orbán’s cabinet, one should emphasize not only the special nature of his personal relationship with the President of Russia but also the existing historical precedent when Hungary evaded participation in the war in Yugoslavia unleashed by NATO immediately after the Central European states had been admitted to this organization. While condemning Moscow’s actions, Hungary at first did not consider it necessary to take a more active part in helping Ukraine as opposed to its partners in the Visegrád Group.

During the meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrád Group countries in London with the British Prime Minister on March 8, a joint statement and communiqué was adopted. It read as follows:<sup>4</sup>

We, the leaders of the Visegrád Group (V4) Countries and the UK, stand united in condemning Russia’s aggression on Ukraine—a brutal, unprovoked and premeditated attack against a sovereign, peaceful democratic state. The actions of Russia, and those who enable them, represent an egregious violation of international law and the UN Charter that undermines European security and stability.

Orbán, Fiala, M. Morawiecki, E. Heger, and B. Johnson expressed their full support for the President, government, and people of Ukraine, who found themselves in war conditions and defended the sovereignty of their country. The prime ministers agreed to coordinate as allies their response to Russia “through the most punitive sanctions and measures, including referral to the ICC.” Regarding Ukraine, the leaders of the five states agreed to support the growing number of refugees, mostly women, children, and the elderly, fleeing the bombing of civilian targets.

In addition to the topic of cybersecurity raised during the meeting, the heads of the governments also discussed the problem of reducing dependence on natural fuels from Russia as part of improving the collective energy security.

The next meeting within the V4 framework was held in Budapest on June 30, 2022. It discussed the results of the Hungarian presidency and officially proclaimed the transfer of control levers from Hungary to Slovakia based on the principle of rotation, enshrined in the Visegrád community. At the same time, a meet-

<sup>4</sup> V4 + United Kingdom Joint Statement of Prime Ministers March 8, 2022, London. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=488>. Cited September 18, 2022.

ing of the ministers of internal affairs of the Visegrád Group countries was held.<sup>5</sup> The need for this was caused by another wave of refugees—this time from neighboring Ukraine. The issue of migration from Russia of those who disagree with V. Putin's policy was also on the agenda.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as of March 13, the number of refugees from Ukraine accepted by the countries of Central Europe directly bordering Ukraine was 2593236 people, including 2180380 people in Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland. In addition, 132591 people moved to Russia and Belarus.<sup>6</sup> By the end of May, the picture had changed. Three months later, 3251955 refugees from Ukraine were registered in Poland, 577820 in Hungary, and 406833 in Slovakia.

During the meeting in Budapest, the interior ministers of the Visegrád Group countries agreed on their commitment to curb illegal migration in the region, particularly in the Western Balkans, which was increasing. However, the main topic was still new developments on the eastern borders of the European Union. As emphasized, they require that the EU adapt the existing legal framework to the new situation, which will enable member states to respond effectively to the coming challenges. The ministers condemned Russia's actions and expressed their support for Ukraine. They agreed that the war in Ukraine presents an unprecedented challenge to the European Union and the member states of the Central European region, which account for a significant share of the flow of war refugees. At the same time, they noted that the prolongation of the conflict would have further long-term consequences of global significance and assured each other that Budapest, Bratislava, Prague, and Warsaw could count on each other to solve these problems. The meeting expressed the confidence that V4 would be able to provide adequate protection to refugees arriving from Ukraine in accordance with the relevant EU legislation and the national legislation of the countries. It was decided to ask the European Commission to ensure that appropriate EU resources would be made available to the member states caught in this complex crisis.

On October 11, in Bratislava, a meeting of the presidents of the Visegrad Four was held already within the framework of the presidency of Slovakia. In its course, Katalin Novak, Andrzej Duda, Zuzana Čaputová, and Miloš Zeman confirmed their position on the events in Ukraine, condemning Russia's aggression. Since

the meeting took place after the referendums held in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, the heads of state also announced the nonrecognition of their results. Thus, Novak, who took part in the B4 presidential summits for the first time, said, "We strongly condemn Putin's aggression, condemn the armed attack on a sovereign independent country, condemn the announcement of the annexation of Ukrainian territories and the bombing of civilian objects. The threat of using nuclear weapons is unacceptable. We will do everything that it is in our power to create the conditions for a just world as soon as possible, because we must preserve the secure life we have been given for our children and grandchildren." Nevertheless, the hostess of the summit, Čaputová, noted in her speech the absence of a unified position of the Visegrad countries on the supply of arms to Ukraine, referring to Hungary. However, Czech President Zeman stood up for Budapest, saying that Hungary is actively involved in demining objects on the territory of Ukraine. In addition, he expressed his desire to accept Slovenia into the Visegrad Group, which for many years fully shared its aspirations.

#### AID TO UKRAINE

The countries of Central Europe called the actions started by Russia in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, "aggression" and "war" using different degrees of expression. The leaders and leading politicians of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia in the very first weeks after the start of the conflict, or in the very first days, visited Kyiv to express solidarity with the Ukrainian people and personally shake hands with President V. Zelenskii. Thus, President of Poland A. Duda after February 24 visited Kyiv four times and spoke in the Rada; President of Slovakia Z. Čaputová came to Kyiv once and also spoke to the deputies of the Ukrainian parliament. The Prime Ministers of Slovakia and Poland, Heger and Morawiecki, and ministers of their cabinets visited Kyiv several times and met with senior officials. Together with the leaders of Poland, Lithuania, and Slovenia, on March 15, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Fiala visited Kyiv and met with the President, and Foreign Minister J. Lipavský visited Kyiv in the summer. From Hungary, Parliamentary Secretary of State and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs L. Magyar visited Ukraine.

As in 2014, Central European politicians decided to help repair the damage caused to Ukraine. Moreover, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia also carried out military—technical supplies. Like the Baltic countries, they handed over to Kyiv outdated in terms of modernization but fully functional Soviet-style military equipment. Hungary refused to supply equipment and weapons for reasons of principle. In addition, Czech President M. Zeman signed a law allowing

<sup>5</sup> Meeting of the ministers of interior of the Visegrád group, Budapest, June 30, 2022, Joint declaration. <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/download.php?docID=497>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Ukraine Refugee situation, UNCHR. [https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#\\_ga=2.57038255.465250922.1663537917-1988921164.1663537917](https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine#_ga=2.57038255.465250922.1663537917-1988921164.1663537917). Cited September 18, 2022.

Czech volunteers to take part in hostilities on the territory of Ukraine.

Poland has provided Ukraine with weapons and other military equipment worth at least \$1.7 billion, said President Duda,<sup>7</sup> who repeated his call for the country's allies to help it fill the gap caused by the transfer to Kyiv. "We are giving Ukraine the greatest military aid we have ever provided to any country," said Duda. "We are also the main supplier of heavy weapons to Ukraine. We are talking about hundreds of tanks, combat vehicles, and artillery, as well as drones, anti-aircraft launchers, ammunition, spare parts, and other equipment." As follows from the same source, Poland is the third country in terms of military supplies to Ukraine after the United States and Britain.<sup>8</sup> According to Bloomberg, Poland's total aid to Ukraine in 2022 may exceed \$5 billion.<sup>9</sup>

The data show that Estonia (0.83%) was the leader in terms of supply value (i.e., in terms of national GDP) for the period from January to August; it was followed by Latvia (0.8%) and Poland (0.49%).<sup>10</sup> The volume of the aid from the Czech Republic and Slovakia was the same, 0.19%. Aid from Hungary amounted to 0.03% at that time. For comparison, Germany's aid amounted to 0.08%, and that of France, to 0.04% of the GDP of these countries. The content of the aid also varies. While Estonia supplies Ukraine exclusively with military aid, the Polish package is dominated by financial support.<sup>11</sup>

Speaking at a donor conference in Warsaw in May, Czech Foreign Minister Lipavský said that the Czech government would allocate an additional €18 mln (about 443 mln CZK) to Ukraine as humanitarian aid. By that time, the Czech Republic had already provided Kyiv with assistance in the amount of €22 million (more than 540 million CZK). According to the minister, during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year, the Czech Republic could also hold a donor conference. At the same time, states and organizations

pledged to allocate a total of \$6.5 billion (more than 150 billion CZK).<sup>12</sup>

Aid from the Czech Cabinet of Ministers will amount to about one billion CZK. According to Lipavský, much larger sums were in the accounts of humanitarian organizations. "For this, we must thank all the citizens of the Czech Republic, who help the Ukrainians in this difficult situation in any way they can." Lipavský also recalled that the Czech Republic had accepted more than 300,000 Ukrainian refugees. The conflict in Ukraine and its associated humanitarian and geopolitical implications also set the priorities for the upcoming Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU. "We are ready to initiate a comprehensive program of stabilization, reconstruction, and resilience of Ukraine with regional coverage of Moldova and Georgia," he said.

At the same conference, Hungarian Foreign Minister P. Szijjártó, according to the MTI agency, offered Ukraine €37 million (911 million CZK) as aid and "condemned Russian aggression and gross violations of human rights." "We can clearly tell the attacker from the attacked," he said.<sup>13</sup>

Prime Minister of Slovakia Heger also stated that his country is in solidarity with Ukraine and is its loyal neighbor. "The security and prosperity of Ukraine are also our concern. In addition to financing humanitarian aid and ensuring the vital needs of refugees, we have allocated another five million euros for the development of Ukrainian regions as part of the Slovak-Ukrainian cross-border cooperation."<sup>14</sup>

During his visit to Kyiv and meeting with Zelenskii, the Slovak Prime Minister said that Slovakia had taken a clear position regarding the events in Ukraine from the very beginning.<sup>15</sup>

Our government has offered aid to the Ukrainian military, for example, in the form of repairing their damaged or obsolete equipment. We can also recall the donation of the S-300 air defense system, an event that caused controversy among Slovaks. However, we also sent millions of euros worth of other equipment and military equipment to Ukraine. It also includes Zuzana 2 howitzers and 30 armored personnel carriers.

<sup>7</sup> Poland has given Ukraine military aid worth at least \$1.7 billion and expects allies to help fill the gaps. Notes from Poland, June 15 (2022). <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/06/15/poland-has-given-ukraine-military-aid-worth-at-least-1-7bn-expects-allies-to-help-fill-the-gaps/>. Cited September 9, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Poland will spend 1% of GDP to aid Ukraine refugees, Study Shows, Bloomberg, July 27 (2022). <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-27/poland-will-spend-1-of-gdp-to-aid-ukraine-refugees-study-shows>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Total bilateral aid commitments to Ukraine as a percentage of donor gross domestic product (GDP) between January 24 and August 3, 2022, by country, Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1303450/bilateral-aid-to-ukraine-in-a-percent-of-donor-gdp/>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Pomoc dla Ukrainy: Wsparcie z Polski należy do największych, wyjaśniamy czyja to zasługa, Apr. 23 (2022). <https://300gospodarka.pl/analizy/pomoc-dla-ukrainy-wsparcie-z-polski-nalezy-do-najwiekszych-wyjasniamy-czyja-to-zasluga>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Česko dá dalších téměř 450 milionů Kč na humanitární pomoc Ukrajině, České Noviny, May 5 (2022). <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/cesko-da-dalsich-temer-450-milionu-kc-na-humanitarni-pomoc-ukrajine/2201733>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Slovensko poskytne Ukrajině pomoc viac ako 530 miliónov eur zo zdrojov EÚ. <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/slovensko-poskytne-ukrajine-pomoc-viac-ako-530-milionov-eur-zo-zdrojov-eu/>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Slovenská pomoc Ukrajině v pomere so štátnym HDP: Sme vo svetovej top desiatke pred Českom. <https://www.startitup.sk/slovenska-pomoc-ukrajine-v-pomere-so-statnym-hdp-sme-vo-svetovej-top-desiatke-pred-ceskom/>. Cited September 18, 2022.

The Slovak Prime Minister also explained that Slovakia received compensation from its NATO allies for these deliveries.

In September, Czech Defense Minister J. Černočová also mentioned compensation from the Western allies in an interview. According to her, the Czech Republic supplied Ukraine with about four billion crowns worth of weapons and equipment and could be compensated for up to 80% of the military aid it sent to Ukraine from European Union funds.<sup>16</sup> According to the minister, since the Czech Republic was one of the first countries to send weapons to Ukraine, Czech arms companies have a chance to work more closely with Ukraine. They can also raise funds from multiple foundations. At the summer donor conference for Ukraine in Copenhagen, the Czech Republic presented about 50 industrial projects that the Czech defense industry would be able to implement in the coming months in cooperation with the Ukrainians.

The relations of Budapest and Kyiv, unlike those of other Visegrád capitals, did not go well for a long time. The former ambassador to Budapest, L. Nepop, openly supported the opposition during the 2022 parliamentary elections. The two national leaders also used every chance to offend one another. Like the Brussels authorities, Zelenskii reproached Orbán for his ties with Moscow, with Putin. Nevertheless, the Hungarians did not refuse to help the neighboring state. In addition to helping during the international donor marathon, Hungary supplied medical equipment and food. After having visited Kyiv and the world-famous settlement of Bucha near Kyiv, Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary Magyar announced Hungary's readiness to build there a kindergarten, a hospital, a post office, and a building for the city administration.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Magyar announced Hungary's readiness to create opportunities to bring Ukraine's grain exports to world markets.<sup>18</sup>

It is difficult to establish comparatively how many refugees within these countries were assisted since most of them move around Europe, return to their homeland, or even leave for relatives in Russia. Thus, in the six months since the start of the military operation, 5.6 million Ukrainians entered Poland, and 3.6 million later crossed the border in the opposite

direction. In the case of Slovakia, this is 713000, and 448000 returned to Ukraine. Hungary accepted 1342000 refugees, but there is no data on departure.<sup>19</sup> According to data as of mid-September 2022,<sup>20</sup> 1379000 Ukrainians were registered in Poland, 93000 in Slovakia, 29000 in Hungary, and 431000 in the Czech Republic. Note that, unlike other countries, the Czech Republic decided to help not only Ukrainian refugees but also politicians, journalists, and scientists persecuted in Russia. This is quite in accordance with the tradition of 100 years ago, when the first President of Czechoslovakia T. Masaryk announced assistance to the Russian professorial emigration.

In all the countries, special websites and information services for Ukrainian refugees were opened. At first, they received housing or a temporary place of residence, and they were provided with a social package comparable to that provided by the state to its own citizens, but with time restrictions. On September 1, refugee children went to schools and kindergartens. Accordingly, additional opportunities were opened for Ukrainian youth to enter local universities. Thus, in Poland, 142000 Ukrainian children were placed in state educational institutions, and in the Czech Republic, 43 500.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

To assess what is happening in Ukraine after February 24, 2022, and, consequently, to determine the measure of participation in helping the suffering side, the countries of the Visegrád Group have already been pretty heated by the discussion about Moscow's proposals on the topic of "1997." They were united internally by the expectation that the discussion between Moscow and Washington would be resolved—and then the tragedy in the immediate neighborhood followed. Differences in approaches, especially distinguishable between Warsaw and Budapest, did not create conditions for a split within the group, although, of course, they somewhat slowed down its collective activity. The reason for this was, among others, the unrelenting tension in relations between both capitals and Brussels, in which they are in dire need of each other's support. It outweighs, as events show, different approaches to the issue of solidarity with Ukraine. Poland has somewhat reduced its former attachment to Budapest because of its position on Ukraine; however, it prefers not to break relations completely, as it needs the support of Orbán. Orbán, on the other hand, explains the contradiction that has arisen by differences in the approaches of the heart and mind to the

<sup>16</sup>EU by mohla Česku proplatit až 80 procent vojenské pomoci Ukrajině, uvedla ministryně Černočová. <https://www.e15.cz/valka-na-ukrajine/eu-by-mohla-cesku-proplatit-az-80-procent-vojenske-pomoci-ukrajine-uedla-ministryne-cernochova-1393114>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>17</sup>Magyarország segít Ukrajnának az újjáépítésben. Mandiner. [https://maniner.hu/cikk/20220720\\_magyar\\_levente\\_kulugymi\\_niszterium\\_magyarorszag\\_ukrajna\\_segitsegnuyitas\\_ujjaepites](https://maniner.hu/cikk/20220720_magyar_levente_kulugymi_niszterium_magyarorszag_ukrajna_segitsegnuyitas_ujjaepites). Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>18</sup>Magyar Levente: Magyarország folytatja Ukrajna támogatását, Origo, July 18 (2022). <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20220718-magyarorszag-tovabbra-is-tamogatja-ukrajnat.html>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>19</sup>Ukrainian refugees by country CEE 2022, Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293403/cee-ukrainian-refugees-by-country/>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>20</sup>Ukraine Refugee situation, UNCHR. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>. Cited September 18, 2022.

<sup>21</sup>Refugee flows from Ukraine, Data.europa.eu. <https://data.europa.eu/en/datastories/refugee-flows-ukraine>. Cited September 18, 2022.

Ukrainian problem. This is not the first time that Hungary has demonstrated a more flexible position in military conflicts in its region. For example, it avoided involvement in the war in the Balkans in 1999, referring to the desire not to harm its national diaspora in Yugoslav Vojvodina. Now it has taken a similar position on the Russian–Ukrainian armed conflict in view of the Hungarian diaspora in Carpatho-Ukraine, formulating its position with the phrase “this is not our war, Hungary should remain out of it.” At the same time, over the past year, confidence in NATO as a potential defender in the event of an expansion of the threat westward of Ukraine, as well as in the United States, has significantly strengthened in the region.

None of the countries in the region supports Russia’s actions in Ukraine, and everyone wants them to be completed as soon as possible, but everyone sees the only way to influence Russia in the tightening of sanctions, even though, according to the experience of 2014, they are not always effective. This process of “sanctioning” was bound to be led by the Czech Republic as EU Council President, although its relations with Russia had been practically cut a year before the start of the current conflict.

Unfortunately, Russia’s relations with the countries of the region have been going downhill for several years now, dominated by illusory ideas and subjectivist assessments, which only further confuse the situation. The current situation can therefore be viewed as an unfortunate but logical outcome of this approach.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

#### OPEN ACCESS

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## Ukraine's Membership Application As a Trigger to Reform the EU Enlargement Policy

N. Yu. Kaveshnikov<sup>a,b,#</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia*

<sup>b</sup>*Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia*  
e-mail: [nikandrrr@mail.ru](mailto:nikandrrr@mail.ru)

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**Abstract**—The European Union's successive enlargements had a qualitative impact on the nature of the integration organization, entailing changes in the agenda and priorities, institutions, and decision-making process and also changing the attitude of other international actors towards the European Union. The EU's decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine reflects a fundamental change in the logic and goals of the enlargement policy and will have a strategic impact on the design of integration processes both within the EU and on its periphery. This article is devoted to two aspects of the ongoing changes: (1) the geopoliticization of the enlargement policy and (2) the further development of differentiation processes and the prospect for new forms of external differentiation (partial membership).

**Keywords:** European Union, EU enlargement, Ukraine, geopolitics of enlargement, differentiated integration, partial membership

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The series of enlargements of the European Union has led to an increase in the number of member states, population, and the size of the union's economy. In addition, these enlargements also entailed qualitative changes in the agenda and priorities of the Union, institutions and the decision-making process, and changed the attitude towards the European Union on the part of other international actors. It is no coincidence that Hiski Haukkala noted that “the successive rounds of enlargements have been a factor shaping the EU [Haukkala, 2011, p. 47]. From a similar position, Yuri Borko studied the complex relationship between the processes of expanding and deepening of integration [Borko, 2006].

The decision of the European Union to grant the status of a candidate country to Ukraine means a fundamental change in the logic and goal setting of the enlargement policy and will have a strategic impact on the design of integration processes both within the European Union and on its periphery. This article is devoted to the analysis of two aspects of the ongoing changes: (1) the geopoliticization of the enlargement policy and (2) the development of differentiation processes and the prospect for the emergence of new

forms of external differentiated integration (partial membership).

### THE EU ENLARGEMENT POLICY: OVERVIEW

Official rhetoric and foreign expert assessments [Smith, 2003; Vachudova, 2005] note that the policy of enlargement, at least until the end of the 2000s, was the most effective instrument of EU foreign policy.

Historically, two goals of the EU enlargement strategy can be traced.

Through enlargement, the European Union tried to fix the trend towards democratic transition in neighboring countries and thereby reduce the risk of “importing” instability. In particular, this logic appears to have underpinned the decision to start eastward enlargement, adopted in the early 1990s. Later, security stabilization became one of the elements in the preparation of the countries of the Western Balkans for EU membership and an important component of the European Neighborhood Policy/Eastern Partnership.

However, since the early 1990s much more important was the strategy of the European Union projecting its norms and values, for which the enlargement policy provided a legitimate and effective toolkit. At the theoretical level, this was interpreted in terms of external Europeanization [Lavenex, 2004; Radaelli, 2003],

<sup>#</sup> Nikolai Yur'evich Kaveshnikov, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), is Head of the Department of Integration Processes at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) and a Leading Researcher at the RAS Institute of Europe.

political conditionality [Schimmelfennig and Scholtz, 2010], and normative [Manners, 2002] and transformational [Grabbe, 2006] EU power.

From the point of view of the internal evolution of the European Union, the most important consequence of the enlargements of 1995, 2004, and 2007, in our opinion, was the development of elements of differentiated integration in the European Union. In the context of this article, it is especially important that during this period new formats of EU interaction with third countries developed, which can be interpreted as elements of external differentiated integration. Third countries accept the legislation, standards, and regulatory practices of the European Union, but receive neither the right to influence the formation of the *acquis communautaire* nor the right to participate in EU integration projects.<sup>1</sup> As a reward for advancing along the path of reform, candidate countries and countries participating in the Eastern Partnership receive bonuses such as preferential trade regimes, visa-free regimes, etc., that is, more advanced forms of external interaction with the EU system, but not admission into the system. Such external differentiated integration is usually interpreted as either a set of different formats for EU interaction with third countries [Piris, 2016; Babynina, 2021; Gstöhl and Phinmore, 2021] or the concept of concentric circles of external governance [De Neve, 2007; Kaveshnikov, 2011; Lavenex, 2011].

Since the late 2000s, the enlargement policy has stalled both in the geographical sense and in the sense of the transformation of the applicant countries.<sup>2</sup> Until 2022, it was de facto limited to the region of the Western Balkans.<sup>3</sup> Three reasons are usually given to explain this: the EU is tired of enlargement, the applicant countries are tired of waiting, and the influence of other actors (China, Russia). Thus, using the example of the Western Balkans, one can see the factors that determine the limits of the effectiveness of the conditionality and the transformational power of the EU [Elbasani, 2013; Kandel, 2020]. In many respects, the situation in the Eastern Partnership countries appeared similar [Borzel and Langbein, 2013; Bazhan, 2015]. In addition, competition between the integration projects of the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Economic Union was growing in Eastern Europe, reflecting the growing geopolitical tensions

between Russia and the West [Delcour, 2015; Korostel'eva, 2016; Vinokurov et al., 2015].

The EU enlargement policy after 2004–2007 balanced between the need to define the borders of the “Europe of the European Union” and the fear of undermining the normative power of the EU as a result of abandoning the principle of openness to all European states. It should be recognized that the Western Balkan and Eastern European countries increasingly perceived the practice of enlargement policy as a practice of exclusion, as the construction of a normative and institutional “wall” around the perimeter of the EU [Bélanger and Schimmelfennig, 2021; Scazzieri, 2021]. In academic discourse, the relationship between the removal of barriers (in the broad sense of the word) within the EU (debordering) and the strengthening of barriers at the external border (rebordering) has become legitimate, but not recognized by politicians [Schimmelfennig, 2021].

### GEOPOLITICS OF ENLARGEMENT

The strengthening of the geopolitical component in the enlargement policy is inscribed in the general evolution of the EU's foreign policy. The first results of a conceptual review of the foundations of foreign policy were reflected in the EU Global Strategy of 2016. A new balance between interests and values was established in the formula of “principled pragmatism,” which reflected a shift from the goals of transforming partners (especially neighbors) to a more realistic approach aimed at promoting the resilience of partner countries [Danilov, 2017; Romanova and Pavlova, 2019]. The concept of resilience logically supplemented the concept of the EU's strategic sovereignty (strategic autonomy), discussions about which have been going on for the past decades. The need to achieve strategic sovereignty has become a key objective of the EU foreign policy and, in general, integration building during the “geopolitical” European Commission of Ursula von der Leyen. The use of “the rhetoric of sovereignty reveals the EU's desire for the status of a great power ... for the geopoliticization of the EU's external relations” [Romanova, 2021, p. 42]. At the same time, the geopolitical dimension of foreign policy “today is a new basis for intra-European consolidation” [Bolgova, 2020, p. 42].

For many years, foreign policy of the European Union did not take into account the obvious factor that “geopolitics still matters, and the great powers play power politics”; in recent years, the European Union has increasingly faced challenges related to the actions of the three great powers—the United States, China, and Russia [Biscop, 2019, pp. 7, 8, 18]. Such geopolitical concerns were also expressed in relation to the situation in the regions neighboring the European Union: back in 2018, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said, “We must find unity when it comes to the Western Balkans — once and for

<sup>1</sup> A few exceptions—the participation of Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein in the Schengen area and in the Single Internal Market—are due to historical specifics and the presence of the Nordic cooperation system, which unites countries that are members and nonmembers of the European Union.

<sup>2</sup> Since the countries aspiring to join the European Union have different statuses (candidates, potential candidates) or no special status at all (like the countries of the Eastern Partnership until 2022), in this article, speaking about the totality of these states, we use the term applicants.

<sup>3</sup> In June 2018, the EU Council froze accession negotiations with Turkey, because of both normative and geopolitical motives.

all. Should we not, our immediate neighbourhood *will be shaped by others*. [emphasis added by N.K.].”<sup>4</sup>

The concept of resilience allows the European Union to “pragmatically balance interests and principles” [Blockmans, 2017, p. 7], while ensuring strategic sovereignty should provide tools for more effective interaction with the outside world. The goal of EU foreign policy should be to protect European interests, to ensure that Europeans can continue to live the way they have chosen, and not to change the way other people live [Biscop, 2019]. From this point of view, the key interest of the European Union in relation to neighboring countries is to promote their stability and prevent the influx of refugees and economic migrants, the import of terrorism, the import of instability from zones of regional conflicts, etc.

The geopoliticization of foreign policy was reflected in the evaluation of the enlargement policy. The European Commission in the Communication of 2018 declared that potential accession of the countries of the Western Balkans corresponds to “the Union’s very own political, security and economic interest,” that this is a “geostrategic investment,” “an investment in the EU’s security, economic growth and influence and in its ability to protect its citizens.”<sup>5</sup>

Comparative analysis of the Communication of the European Commission of 2018 and the previous document of 2015 shows a change in rhetoric regarding the Western Balkans, from the priority promotion of EU norms to the protection of EU interests in the region [Petrovic and Tzifakis, 2021]. The evolution of the position of the European Commission reflected changes in political rhetoric in the EU countries; in the national discourse on enlargement and the Eastern Partnership, issues of economy and democratization gradually gave way to security concerns [Góra, 2021]. At the same time, “geopoliticization” does not mean the imposition of membership, the key prerequisite for the EU enlargement policy is still the desire of the applicant countries to become members of the European Union and receive all the benefits arising from this.

At the same time, the growing geopolitical discourse on enlargement in the Western Balkans has not led to significant changes in practical policy until recently [Petrovic and Tzifakis, 2021]. In the Eastern Partnership region, the European Union was in principle unable to develop a common position on whether these countries should be included in some common space with the European Union to minimize the threats and risks arising from there.

<sup>4</sup> Juncker, J.-C. The State of the Union 2018: The Hour of European Sovereignty, Speech by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, Sep. 13 (2018). <https://youtu.be/CPa7-WiZ3uE>.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, COM(2018) 65, Feb. 6 (2018), p. 1.

Moscow’s decision to launch a large-scale special military operation on the territory of Ukraine has become a powerful trigger for strengthening the geopolitical component in the EU’s foreign policy. Already on February 24, 2022, the European Council characterized Moscow’s actions as “unprovoked and unjustified military aggression.”<sup>6</sup> The Versailles Declaration, adopted at the informal meeting of EU leaders on March 10–11, showed a broad consensus that Russia’s actions “constitute a tectonic shift in European history.”<sup>7</sup> This conflict is certainly a conflict over the formation of the future world order. The position of President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen—“This is a clash between the rule of law and the rule of the gun, between democracies and autocracies, between a rules-based order and a world of naked aggression. How we respond today to what Russia is doing will determine the future of the international system”<sup>8</sup>— reflects the mood of most politicians in the EU countries (and more broadly, Western countries).

For many years, Western countries believed that they would be able to maintain a balance between containment of Russia and constructive practical cooperation. As Dmitrii Danilov rightly notes, they “underestimated Moscow’s readiness to abandon the tactical game ... in favor of a strategic choice” (cited by Gromyko et al., 2022, p. 80). Today, the EU countries, and more broadly the countries of the global West, see no medium-term opportunity to return to the balance of the previous decade.

The extremely sharp reaction to Russia’s actions is provoked, among other things, by the fact that Ukraine is perceived by Europeans as a member of the family, and “aggression against Ukraine,” as an attack on “one of us.” These views are now characteristic of the public opinion of the EU countries and the majority of the political elite.

The current conflict has forced European countries to rethink their security strategy radically. Currently, European countries are increasing their defense budgets and are implementing a wide range of long-term and short-term practical military-political measures at the national and community levels. Adopted on March 21, 2022, the EU Strategic Compass<sup>9</sup> “reflected a significant and long-term shift in the position of the European Union towards Russia, the

<sup>6</sup> European Council, Feb. 24 (2022), Conclusions on Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, Brussels, EUCO 18/22.

<sup>7</sup> Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government, March 10 and 11, 2022. Versailles Declaration.

<sup>8</sup> Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary, SPEECH/22/1483, Brussels, Mar. 1 (2022). [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_22\\_1483](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_22_1483). Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense, Doc. 7371/22, Brussels, Mar. 21 (2022). <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf>. Cited August 7, 2022.

opposition to which has now become the most important task of the CSDP” [Aleshin, 2022]. Cooperation between the European Union and NATO and coordination of actions in the G7 format have intensified.

Precisely because Ukraine is now perceived as part of the “European family,” the European Union and member states are implementing a wide range of measures to support Kyiv, including the first ever supply of lethal weapons in the history of the European Union. It is no coincidence that, speaking about the supply of weapons, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell noted, “Another taboo has fallen... Yes, we are doing it. Because this war requires our engagement to support the Ukrainian army.”<sup>10</sup> Assessing the threat as a strategic one, the Europeans are ready to pay a big price. As Ursula von der Leyen put it in September 2022: “Many of us have taken democracy for granted for far too long.... Today we all see that we must fight for our democracy every single day.”<sup>11</sup>

The change in attitude towards Ukraine made possible a substantive discussion of the country’s application for EU membership. For some time, there has been an intense discussion in the European Union about Ukraine’s compliance with the membership criteria and the need to comply with the procedure, as well as potential risks. However, in the end, the political approach prevailed over the technocratic one.

Noteworthy is the speed with which the European Commission prepared a conclusion on the possibility of granting Ukraine the status of a candidate country. Ukraine received questionnaires on April 8 (on compliance with political and economic criteria) and on April 13 (on the degree of adaptation to the *acquis*), submitted its answers on April 17 and May 9, and already on June 17, the European Commission issued a positive conclusion.<sup>12</sup>

An extraordinary and symbolic event was the visit to Kyiv on June 16, 2022, of the German Chancellor, the President of France, and the Prime Minister of Italy, during which they supported the proposal to grant Ukraine the status of a candidate country. After that, a few skeptical EU countries had to accept the inevitable, and a positive decision was a foregone conclusion.

The European Council on June 23–24 officially granted Ukraine the status of a candidate country. The discourse justifying this decision is mainly of geo-

political nature. President of the European Council Charles Michel said after the summit, “This is a historic moment, which allows us to sketch the *contours of the European Union*.... We are sending a very strong message: it is at once a message of unity and a *signal of geopolitical determination* [emphasis added N.K.].”<sup>13</sup> Josep Borrell noted that this is a signal not only to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, but it is a signal that “should echo loudly beyond our borders as a manifestation of our strength and unity and support to these three countries, and especially to the one that is being aggressed by Russia.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, the previously hidden geopolitical dimension of the enlargement process is now becoming more pronounced.

It is symptomatic that Georgia has not received candidate status, although, according to expert assessments (see the third part), its compliance with EU standards of political and economic governance is at least no lower than that of Moldova and Ukraine. Apparently, the European Union decided to provide support to those countries that are faced with current military-political risks.

Stating the fact of strategic confrontation and sdivision of Europe, Russian President Vladimir Putin repeatedly spoke about the economic, financial, and technological aggression of the West, “I am talking about aggression, there is no other way to call it.”<sup>15</sup> Western leaders interpret this confrontation as a conflict between democracy and autocracy. For them, as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz noted, “the question arises of where the dividing line between a free Europe and a neo-imperialist autocracy will henceforth be drawn.”<sup>16</sup> The whole range of measures to support Ukraine and put pressure on Russia is an attempt to answer this question. A reviewed policy of enlargement is also a means to demarcate this border between the two parts of Europe; Ursula von der Leyen, delivering annual State of the Union speech in the European Parliament on September 14, 2022, said, “I want the people of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to know: You are part of our family,

<sup>13</sup>Remarks by President Charles Michel following the first working session of the European Council, June 23 (2022). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/23/intervention-du-president-michel-a-l-issue-de-la-premiere-seance-de-travail-du-conseil-europeen-23-juin-2022/>. Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>14</sup>Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the press conference, June 20 (2022). [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference-2\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference-2_en). Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>15</sup>The President took part in the plenary session of the Eastern Economic Forum, Sep. 7 (2022). <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/69299>. Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>16</sup>Scholz called for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to join the EU, Deutsche Welle, Aug. 29 (2022). <https://www.dw.com/ru/kanceler-frg-solc-prizval-prinat-v-es-ukrainu-moldovu-i-gruziju/a-62959770>. Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>10</sup>Eudebates.tv, Feb. 28 (2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNd-mSWurjI>. Cited: August 7, 2022.

<sup>11</sup>2022 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen: A Union that Stands Strong Together, Speech/22/5493, Strasbourg, Sep. 14 (2022). [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/press-corner/api/files/document/print/ov/speech\\_22\\_5493/SPEECH\\_22\\_5493\\_OV.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/press-corner/api/files/document/print/ov/speech_22_5493/SPEECH_22_5493_OV.pdf). Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>12</sup>European Commission, Commission Opinion on Ukraine’s application for membership of the European Union, COM(2022) 407, June 17 (2022).

your future is in our Union, and our Union is not complete without you!”<sup>17</sup>

### THE CONCEPT OF PARTIAL MEMBERSHIP AS A NEW TREND IN EXTERNAL DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION

In the first part of this article, it was noted that one of the consequences of the enlargement policy was an increase in the elements of differentiation within the European Union, as well as the development of external differentiated integration. At the same time, within the framework of external differentiated integration, candidate countries and applicant countries receive more advanced forms of external interaction with the European Union, but until the moment of entry they do not receive admission “inside” the political, socioeconomic, and regulatory space of the European Union.

The fundamental readiness to reconsider this logic is declared in the new approach to enlargement, which the European Commission unveiled in 2020.<sup>18</sup> One of the key elements of the new approach, the principle of “positive and negative conditionality,” implies predetermined incentives that candidate countries can receive based on the progress of reforms at each stage of the pre-accession process. At the same time, it is possible to deprive a candidate country of previously granted incentives in the event of “any stagnation or serious backsliding in the reform process.” What is especially important in the context of this article is that one of the forms of incentive could be “closer integration” of candidate countries with the European Union and their “phasing-in to individual EU policies, the EU market and EU programmes.”<sup>19</sup>

Until recently, the idea of partial membership had not received significant practical implementation. However, there remains a political consensus in the EU in support of this idea. In particular, the European Council in June 2022 noted the need to “to further advance the gradual integration” between the European Union and the candidate countries “in a reversible and merit-based manner.”<sup>20</sup>

In this context, we should mention the ideas of the European Political Community (French President Emmanuel Macron<sup>21</sup>) and the European Geopolitical

Community (President of the European Council Charles Michel<sup>22</sup>). These ideas are very vague; in most general form they proposed to create an institutionalized format of relations between the European Union and neighboring countries, including political dialogue and closer cooperation in the field of energy, transport, investment, and people movement. Such a format could theoretically become, by analogy with the European Economic Area, a way to involve candidate countries partially in the economic and regulatory space of the European Union and provide mechanisms for taking their voice into account in the decision-making process. However, other formats for organizing partial membership are also possible, which, if put into practice, will lead to the emergence of new forms of differentiation within the European Union due to the partial admission of candidate countries “inside” the EU space in terms of both economic activity and participation in decision-making.

In parallel, since 2021, various forms of partial membership have been discussed at the expert level in relation to the countries of the Western Balkans [Scazzieri, 2021; Emerson et al., 2021]. This expert discussion intensified in the spring of 2022 in the context of active combat operations on the territory of Ukraine [Emerson et al., 2022; Scazzieri, 2022; Chopin et al., 2022].

All these expert papers propose the participation of candidate countries in individual EU integration projects and policies, various forms of their participation in the activities of EU institutions, primarily the Council of Ministers and its working bodies (in the status of observers or with the right to participate in discussions but without the right to vote), and their access to funding from the EU budget in accordance with the general rules of the EU sectoral policies but in a smaller amount (for example, in the amount of 50–75% of the amounts due to full EU members).

Paradoxically, Ukraine, as well as Moldova and Georgia, have shown at least comparable success to the countries of the Western Balkans in implementing the reforms envisaged by the process of rapprochement with the European Union. Based on the results of annual monitoring, the European Commission noted that Ukraine has ensured a high degree of harmonization of national legislation with EU law: in 2020, the country implemented 54% of the *acquis*; in 2021 this figure increased to 63%; and in 2022, to 70%.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup>2022 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen: A Union that Stands Strong Together, SPEECH/22/5493, Strasbourg, Sep. 14 (2022). [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/ov/speech\\_22\\_5493/SPEECH\\_22\\_5493\\_OV.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/ov/speech_22_5493/SPEECH_22_5493_OV.pdf). Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>18</sup>European Commission, Communication: Enhancing the accession process—A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans, COM(2020) 57, Feb. 5 (2020).

<sup>19</sup>Op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>European Council Conclusions, June 23 and 24 (2022), EUCO 24/22.

<sup>21</sup>Speech by Emmanuel Macron at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Published on May 10 (2022). <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/speech-by-emmanuel-macron-at-the-closing-ceremony-of-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/>. Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>22</sup>Speech by President Charles Michel at the plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee, May 18 (2022). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/05/18/discours-du-president-charles-michel-lors-de-la-session-pleniere-du-comite-economique-et-social-europeen/>. Cited August 7, 2022.

<sup>23</sup>European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working Document, Association Implementation Report on Ukraine, SWD(2020) 329, Nov. 27 (2020); European Commission, Commission Opinion on Ukraine's application for membership of the European Union, COM(2022) 407, June 17 (2022).

In 2021, experts from one of the leading European think tanks, the Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS), compared the extent to which the countries of the Western Balkans and the three countries of the Eastern Partnership (Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) have progressed in implementing the reforms provided for by agreements with the EU [Emerson et al., 2021]. Such a comparison is fundamentally possible, since the detailed action plans provided for in the Association Agreements are largely similar to the commitments of candidate countries in the process of accession negotiations. The CEPS experts used the methodology that the European Commission uses in evaluating the progress of the candidate countries and assessed their readiness for accession for each of the negotiating chapters in points from 0 (not at all ready) to 3 (good readiness). As a result, they concluded that, from a technical point of view, the readiness of Georgia for EU membership in 2020 (1.93 points), Ukraine (1.81), and Moldova (1.71) was higher than that of potential candidates—Kosovo (1.35) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1.55)—and is comparable to the readiness of Albania (1.73), which has the status of a candidate country.

In the 2010s political and geopolitical considerations determined an extremely restrained approach to the prospects for the accession of the countries of the Eastern Partnership to the European Union. Potential risks gave reason to underestimate the progress of these countries along the path of reforms recommended by the European Union. In the spring of 2022, when all these risks materialized on an unexpected scale, the geopolitical logic of the European Union began to work in favor of Kyiv, as shown in the second part of this article.

By the results of assessment of Ukraine's application for accession, the European Commission concluded that the country has a "vital democracy," and the economy demonstrates "strong macroeconomic record" and a noteworthy resilience... after February 2022."<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the European Commission, recommending to grant Ukraine a candidate status, noted that the country needs to carry out serious reforms in the future in the field of justice, the fight against corruption and money laundering, media regulation, and legislation on national minorities.<sup>25</sup>

Given the presence of political will on the part of Brussels and the member states, the high degree of regulatory compatibility and the existing assessments of the implementation of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement, it can be assumed that the European Union, in the logic of partial membership, can offer Ukraine a fairly wide range of forms of partial membership.

<sup>24</sup>European Commission, Commission Opinion on Ukraine's application for membership of the European Union, COM(2022) 407, June 17 (2022), pp. 2, 19, 20.

<sup>25</sup>Op. cit., pp. 20–21.

In terms of political cooperation, informal participation in individual European Council summits and some meetings of sectoral Council of Ministers is possible (this practice already took place in the spring and summer of 2022). On a practical level, one can predict the participation in the activities of some working bodies of the Council of Ministers (committees, working groups) when they discuss issues directly related to interaction between the European Union and Ukraine. In the medium term, the permanent participation of Ukrainian representatives as observers in the activities of the working bodies of the Council of Ministers in those sectoral areas of EU policy to which Ukraine can be connected is not ruled out. It is quite easy to involve Ukraine in the work of some EU agencies, for example, the European Committee for Standardization.

In terms of economic integration, Ukraine's admission to the EU Single Market in terms of free movement of goods is very likely. Technically, this is possible, since even in previous years the European Commission noted the great progress of Ukraine in the field of standardization and technical regulation. It is symptomatic that in June 2022 the European Union suspended (for a period of one year) the import duties in trade with Ukraine.

Even today, there are no significant technical obstacles to involve Ukraine in a number of EU sectoral policies. First of all, these are energy (in the context of membership in the Energy Community and participation in the Energy Connectivity in Central and Southeastern Europe initiative, Ukraine has ensured a high degree of regulatory compatibility with the European Union), transport (in the context of the implementation of the Association Agreement, Ukraine generally corresponds to the level of regulatory compatibility with the European Union, achieved by the countries of the Western Balkans within the framework of the Transport Community), and telecommunications (plans have already been announced to include Ukraine in the EU free roaming space).

In the medium term, it is possible to involve Ukraine in such integration projects as the Digital Single Market and the Banking Union.

In the medium or long term, one can not exclude the spread of the activities of the EU structural funds to Ukraine, provided that the funds allocated to it are limited. Such a limitation is theoretically possible in the form of a limit on allocated funds (a share of GDP) or in other forms.

Of course, various formats of partial membership will be offered not only to Ukraine but also to Moldova, Georgia, and the countries of the Western Balkans. These forms of participation of candidate countries in the EU activities will be positioned not as an alternative (as, for example, was originally conceived in the Eastern Partnership program) but as transitional steps on the way to full membership.

Forms of political participation by candidate countries may be implemented in the near future. Gradual inclusion of candidate countries in particular EU sectoral policies can be carried out taking into account their economic dynamics, as well as political and regulatory reforms required in the context of accession negotiations. As for Ukraine, most economic forms of partial membership can be implemented only after the cessation of active combat operations on the territory of the country. The speed and degree of involvement in sectoral policies will inevitably be linked to the restoration of the economic potential of Ukraine and later to the continuation of sectoral reforms. Most likely, the European Union, when deciding whether to involve Ukraine in individual sectoral policies, will assess progress in areas such as the quality of public administration, the reform of law enforcement agencies, and the fight against corruption as a framework condition.

The European Union is not ready to give Ukraine a “fast track” of accession, but has already given it a “quick start” and is very likely to be ready to give it and other applicant countries some form of partial membership.

At the moment, it is not clear how soon and under what conditions the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine will be resolved. This uncertainty makes it extremely difficult to develop any timetable for Ukraine's progress towards EU accession and theoretically possible partial membership formats. In the long term, the question of principle is to what extent the European Union will be ready to provide Ukraine with advanced forms of partial membership in the context of long-term actual and potential security risks. Obviously, the European Union itself is not capable of providing the necessary security guarantees. With such guarantees in place and a steady freezing of the conflict, the European Union will most likely not perceive Ukraine's unresolved territorial disputes as an insurmountable obstacle to advanced partial membership, and in the long term, full membership of Ukraine. In the context of the current confrontation between the European Union and Russia, refusal of membership due to territorial disputes is unacceptable for European politicians, since it would mean that “the enlargement procedures be taken hostage by Russia” [Emerson et al, 2022, p. 7]. Even if scenarios of conflict resolution are favorable for Ukraine, Ukraine's accession to the European Union as a full-fledged member is possible only after the restoration of a significant part of the lost economic potential and the implementation of complex reforms, which can hardly be expected earlier than 10–15 years.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the second half of the 2010s, the process of conceptual rethinking of the EU enlargement policy, its goals, tools, and forms of interaction with the appli-

cant countries was gradually going on. This was partly due to the stalling of the enlargement process, partly due to changes in the regional and global systems of international relations. The Russian–Ukrainian conflict of 2022 and the related decision by Ukraine to send a formal application for EU membership gave a powerful impetus to the transformation of enlargement policy.

The logic of projecting norms and values and transformation of partner countries that dominated earlier in the European Union faded into the background, giving way to the geopolitical logic of ensuring the security of the countries of the “European family.” The large-scale special military operation initiated by Moscow on the territory of Ukraine led to the formation of a strategic division in Europe. The EU enlargement policy is becoming one of the tools by which Western countries are trying to demarcate the emerging border between the two parts of Europe and to protect the “European family” (including non-EU members) from the influence of external actors whose vision of the future and justice fundamentally contradicts the basic “European” values.

The decision of the European Union to grant Ukraine (as well as Moldova) candidate status can intensify the practical implementation of the concept of partial membership of candidate countries outlined in recent years. If the trend of gradual involvement of the candidate countries in the activities of the European Union develops in accordance with the assumptions formulated, this will provide an incentive for the development of new formats for the EU's interaction with these countries and will contribute to the accelerated development of elements of external differentiated integration.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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## European Social Dialogue: History, Characteristics, and Perspectives

L. S. Bisson<sup>#</sup>

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

*e-mail: lyubov.pasyakina@gmail.com*

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**Abstract**—The author examines the role of the European Social Dialogue (ESD) in decision-making on social policy and labor relations at supranational level in the EU. The author looks into the history and distinctive features of the ESD, its formats, procedures, and legal framework. Based on a review of the institutionalization of social dialogue at the national level in the EU-27, the author draws two conclusions. The first is that the development of social dialogue is uneven across the Union because of the particularities of the social models of the member states and their political and socioeconomic development. The second is that, despite national differences, the coverage of workers by collective agreements in the EU as a whole and the entrenchment of social dialogue at the supranational level make it an integral and distinctive feature of the European social model. An analysis of the evolution of the ESD suggests that there has been a continual move towards a more autonomous status for the social partners. However, because of the 2008–2010 crisis, the ESD’s role has significantly weakened. “A New Start for Social Dialogue” announced by the Juncker’s Commission and several further initiatives are largely declarative. The Court of Justice’s 2021 decision limiting the scope for implementing autonomous agreements at the communitarian level could have a negative impact on the further development of the ESD. Finally, the author positively assesses the possible role of the ESD in overcoming the social consequences of internal and external challenges and the negative effects of transformation of the labor markets.

**Keywords:** European Union, social dialogue, social partners, trade unions, labor relations, European Pillar of Social Rights

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One of the key elements of “Social Europe” is the European Social Dialogue (ESD). From the very beginning of European integration, the social partners have played an important and, over time, increasingly prominent role in the development of EU social policy. Social dialogue is included in a wide range of instruments which help the institutions of the Union carry out the harmonization of the social sphere, promote the expansion of employment, and guarantee social protection of citizens. In addition to the fact that the European Commission (EC) consults with the social partners before making legislative proposals on a range of issues that regulate social and labor relations, representatives of workers and employers at the supranational level have contributed to the setting of social standards through autonomous agreements. Initiated by the J.-C. Juncker Commission in 2016, A New Start for Social Dialogue<sup>1</sup> renewed the EU’s commitment to support social dialogue both at the Community level and in the Member States. During

the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on the labor market, the institution of social dialogue became an effective tool for maintaining employment in the early stages [ILO, 2020]. The EU Social Summit held in Porto in May 2021 secured an important role for the European social partners in the further development of Social Europe [Bisson, 2021]. In the second half of 2022, the Commission plans to present a plan to strengthen the institution of social dialogue at the community and national levels. Despite the fact that the ESD has led to significant results in the regulation of labor relations in the EU, there are still a number of obstacles to its effective implementation.

The European social dialogue is a complex phenomenon that is widely studied among foreign researchers. The ESD is considered from the point of view of various theoretical approaches. In recent years, the use of social systems theories has been quite widespread: Luhmann’s theory about autopoietic sys-

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<sup>#</sup> Lyubov’ Sergeevna Bisson, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), is a Senior Researcher in the Department of European Integration Studies, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences.

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<sup>1</sup> A New Start for Social Dialogue, Statement of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, and the European Social Partners, June 27 (2016).

tems [Rogowski, 2000; Hartzén, 2017] and Dunlop's theory of production relations [Omotayo and Allwell, 2014], according to which social dialogue is a social self-sustaining system with inherent elements such as actors, norms and rules governing the relations of industrial stakeholders, and communication. In addition, the multiplicity of participants and levels of social dialogue in the EU allows researchers to consider it within the framework of the theory of multi-level governance [Keune and Marginson, 2015]. Promising, in our opinion, will be studies of social dialogue within the framework of game theory which allows to establish the asymmetry of the interaction of various actors in the decision-making process [Sørensen et al., 2022].

Among Russian researchers the European social dialogue is most often considered as one of the many components of the EU social policy [Kargalova, 2006; Egorova and Kargalova, 2010; Social Europe in the 21st Century, 2011]. Several scientific articles have been devoted to the development of social dialogue either in individual European countries [Mozhaev, 2001; Polyanskaya, 2017, 2019], or in certain industries [Oleinikova and Murav'eva, 2006; Krysova, 2019]. The role of social dialogue in the regulation of labor relations in the EU is analyzed from the legal point of view in monographs on European labor law [Kashkina, 2009; Egorova, 2018]. However, there is a lack of political science research on the role of social partners in decision-making and social policy development at the supranational level in the European Union.

In the context of the European Union, the term *social dialogue* is used to refer to negotiations between representatives of employers and workers—social partners—at various levels: supranational, national, regional, intersectoral, sectoral, and company level. The International Labor Organization (ILO) offers a broader definition of social dialogue, combining it with the notion of tripartism.<sup>2</sup> The European Social Partners themselves limit the definition of social dialogue to only two-way interaction, even in the case of consultations carried out by the Commission in accordance with the procedure established in Articles 154–155 TFEU. Interaction with EU institutions is not considered by the social partners as part of the ESD. The reason for this distinction is that, in their view, it risks undermining the development of the autonomous nature of the ESD. Within this article, we will also use the typology of A. Bogg and R. Dukes, dividing the ESD into a “guided” social dialogue, initiated and carried out by the Commission, and an “autonomous” one, initiated and carried out by the European social partners themselves [Bogg and Dukes, 2013, p. 468].

The purpose of this article was to identify the role of social partners at the community level and their

contribution to deepening the social dimension of integration. The author will rely on a simplified model of the political cycle, first defined by H. Lasswell as a series of stages: agenda setting, policy formulation, decision making, policy implementation, and evaluation [Lasswell, 1956]. The first part of the article will present a general framework for the European social dialogue at the national level in the EU-27 countries. The second part will be devoted to the evolution and main obstacles to the participation of social partners in decision-making at the supranational level, including in an autonomous format. In the final part of the article, conclusions will be drawn and prospects for the development of social dialogue will be discussed.

## SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN THE EU-27 COUNTRIES

Social dialogue has developed at the level of the European Union, reflecting the widespread national practice of the member states. In one form or another, social dialogue takes place in all 27 EU countries, although its significance for industrial relations varies from country to country. It takes various forms, both bilateral and trilateral (or a combination of both), and takes place at both the intersectoral and sectoral levels. Various forms of dialogue reflect the diversity of historically established models of the welfare state in European countries and also correspond to their socioeconomic level of development and political situation. A notable difference is that, in most countries of Western Europe, the current forms of dialogue developed after the Second World War, while in most member states of Central and Eastern Europe, they began to emerge only after the political changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since the 1990s, the development of social dialogue at the EU level has contributed to the development of national bilateral dialogue in some countries where it was previously largely unknown or limited. This is true about the countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. In them, social dialogue, being an integral part of the social *aquis communautaire*, gradually became formalized after joining an integration group [Avdagic, 2002].

The institution of social dialogue is most developed in the EU-15 countries, where cross-sectoral agreements are widespread on a wide range of issues, such as training, employment, health and safety at work, and wages. Despite the occasionally sufficient autonomy of the social partners in these countries, dialogue can be initiated by the government and the agreements reached can be implemented through official state regulations. Public authorities also conduct regular consultations with representatives of trade unions and business in the development of programs and strategies on social and labor issues. In France, for example, the government must consult with the social partners on any legislative or policy proposals relating to individual and collective labor rights, employment, and

<sup>2</sup> ILO Thesaurus, Social dialogue. <https://metadata.ilo.org/thesaurus/-1518031573.html>.

vocational training. In Austria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, there are tripartite forums on common issues of socio-economic development. In all these cases, the line between bilateral dialogue and tripartism is blurred. In most new EU member states representatives of employers, trade unions, and government (and sometimes other interest groups) can discuss general economic and social issues. The roles and powers of specialized bodies, usually in a tripartite format, vary greatly, but they usually perform an advisory and deliberative function in relation to draft laws.

Notably, tripartism is perhaps weakest or least visible in Northern Europe. In Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, there is traditionally a clear separation of the areas of competence of the social partners and public authorities. This means that the opportunities for tripartite institutions are limited, and bilateral autonomous dialogue plays a key role. Autonomous intersectoral and sectoral collective is legally binding in this group of countries. However, in recent years there has been some blurring of the dividing line and a growing trend towards trilateral cooperation on specific issues in Denmark and Finland.

If we compare the EU-27 with other regions of the world, then it can be argued that social dialogue is an integral and distinctive feature of the European social model. With all national and regional differences, industrial relations are largely regulated through the negotiations of social partners. Two-thirds of workers in the EU are covered by collective bargaining agreements; in Japan it is one in five workers; in the United States it is one in eight [European Commission, 2012, p. 23]. In 11 EU Member States (Italy, France, Austria, Belgium, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands), collective agreements cover from 99 to 70% of employees.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that trade union membership is declining in all regions of the world, in the EU countries, associations of workers and employers remain quite significant subjects of regulation of industrial relations at the sectoral level.

In the process of forming a single market, there was a constant balancing between economic and social goals. The integration of markets contributed to the transnationalization of industrial relations. While maintaining the key role of collective bargaining at the national level, especially in matters such as wage determination, the EU has gradually promoted social partnership and negotiations at the EU level on political initiatives and allowing the results of agreements to be transferred to the communitarian level. Among other regional organizations where supranational mechanisms of social dialogue are most developed, it is worth mentioning the leading trade block of South America MERCOSUR. Article 20 of the MER-

COSUR Social and Labor Declaration includes social dialogue as a fundamental right, stating that the participating states “agree to promote social dialogue at a national and regional level, establishing effective mechanisms of permanent consultation between the representatives of the governments, the employers, and the workers, in order to guarantee, through social consensus, favorable conditions for the sustainable economic growth with social justice in the region and for the improvement of the life conditions of its peoples.”<sup>4</sup>

## HISTORY OF THE ESD DEVELOPMENT

The history of the ESD development is the result of a long political process and can be divided into several periods. The advisory function of European social dialogue was already noted in the 1951 Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community and in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. A significant contribution to ESD development was made by J. Delors. As President of the European Commission in 1985, at a meeting in Val Duchesse, he initiated the involvement of the social partners, represented by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and two employers' organizations (the Union of Industrialists of the European Community (UNICE) and the European Center for Public Enterprises (CEEP)), in the process of formation of a single market. This event is often referred to as the starting point for ESD development.

The next agreements were the 1991 UNICE, ETUC, and CEEP Joint Agreement, calling for the Commission to have mandatory consultations with the social partners on social relations legislation and to enable them to negotiate autonomously at the Community level. This requirement of the Joint Agreement was included in the Protocol on Social Policy to the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which meant formal recognition of the role of the social partners in the EU legislative process. The Protocol proclaimed the right of employers and workers acting at Community level to negotiate and enforce binding agreements, either through collective agreements within the member states or through directives adopted by the Council. The ESD received full consolidation in the main text of the Amsterdam Treaty in Articles 137 and 138.<sup>5</sup> During this period the European Social Dialogue led to the implementation, through Council directives, of three framework agreements (on parental leave in 1996, on part-time work in 1997, and on fixed-term employment in 1999).

In his fundamental book on the history of the ESD, the former Deputy Secretary General of the European Trade Union Confederation Jean Lapeyre notes that in the early years the dialogue between the main play-

<sup>3</sup> ILO, Statistics on collective bargaining 2018–2019. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/collective-bargaining/>.

<sup>4</sup> Social and Labour Declaration of the Mercosur 2015, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Articles 154 and 155 as amended by the Treaty of Lisbon.

Table 1

Cross-sectoral ESD	
<i>Agreements implemented in accordance with the EU directive</i>	<i>Autonomous agreements</i>
—Framework Agreement on Parental Leave (Directive 96/34/EC, revised in 2009, Directive 2010/18/EC)	—Framework Agreement on Digitalization (2020)
—Framework Agreement on Fixed-Term Contracts (1999), Directive 1999/70/EC	—Framework Agreement on Active Aging and Intergenerational Approach (2017)
—Framework Agreement on Part-Time Work (1997), Directive 97/81/EC	—Framework Agreement on Inclusive Labor Markets (2010)
	—Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (2007)
	—Framework Agreement on Work-Related Stress (2004)
	—Framework Agreement on Telework (2002)

ers would have stalled if not for the intervention of the Commission [Lapeyre, 2018]. There was little enthusiasm on the part of employers for the development of social dialogue. The intervention of the Commission in these years gave social dialogue the character of tripartism or, in the terminology of A. Bogg and R. Dukes, a “guided” character.

Since 2002, efforts have been made to develop autonomous social dialogue. This was partly done at the initiative of the social partners themselves. At the Social Summit in Laeken in 2001, ETUC, BusinessEurope, and CEEP emphasized the importance of autonomy and insisted on a clear distinction between the different types of communication between the parties: tripartite negotiation, social partners consultations with the Commission and bilateral social dialogue, including both EC-initiated negotiations and negotiations initiated autonomously. Thus, it was an attempt by the social partners to go beyond the “guided” dialogue and take a more independent position. Between 2002 and 2020, six cross-sectoral agreements were concluded (see Table 1), each provided for autonomous implementation by social partners at the national level of the member states, and not by a decision or directive of the Council.

The Lisbon Treaty strengthened the role of the tripartite ESD format. The new Article 152 TFEU established the Tripartite Social Summit on Growth and Employment. The summit was established in 2003 and is held annually between the intersectoral social partners and the President of the Council and the Commission (before the spring meeting of the European Council) and allows the representatives of European business and trade unions to contribute to the EU economic and social strategy for the coming year.

In addition to formal and institutional consolidation, other factors such as the financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009 and the euro area crisis in 2010–2011, also influenced the nature of the ESD. During the postcrisis recovery period social dialogue was

weakened by decentralization, a declining scope of regulation for negotiation, and government intervention in wage policy. This period is characterized by a lack of commitment from employers’ associations to enter into negotiations with the European Trade Union Confederation for binding agreements and also by the reluctance of the Commission to submit sectoral agreements of the social partners to the Council for further implementation in the form of decisions or directives. In general, the Commission’s strategy for carrying out structural reforms had an extremely negative impact on the ESD [Degryse, 2017]. According to several authors, during this period national systems for concluding collective agreements on regulating working conditions and wages also suffered noticeably [Dølvik and Martin, 2015]. As expected, the European social partners disagreed on the policy of austerity. While business organizations were generally in favor of the European Commission’s proposals, trade unions at the national and Community level criticized the measures proposed by the EU institutions, which, in their opinion, would lead to unemployment, lower wages, and a reduction in pensions. During this period, the tripartite forums became the only working form of dialogue for the formation of social policy at the EU level.

#### CONTRADICTIONS OF THE “NEW START OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE”

A shift in the policy of the European Commission was outlined with the presidency of J.-C. Juncker in the period 2014–2019 [Bisson and Borko, 2019]. In his speech to the European Parliament after being elected to office, Juncker said, “Social dialogue suffered during the crisis years. Now it must be resumed at the national and especially at the European level. I would like to be a President of social dialogue.”<sup>6</sup> As early as March 2015, the Juncker Commission took action to combat the observed decline in the ESD and announced a New Start for Social Dialogue. Follow-

ing this, in 2016, the social partners (representatives of employers and trade unions), the Commission, and the President of the EU Council signed a quadripartite agreement of the same name, which confirmed the fundamental role of the European social dialogue in the process of shaping EU social policy, including within the European Semester. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) 2017 also provides for respect for the autonomy and the right to collective action of social partners and recognizes their right to participate in the development and implementation of employment and social policy, including through collective agreements [Govorova, 2018].

Such a turn was associated, among other things, with a request for “Social Europe” from the citizens of the Union. The problem of trust in supranational institutions and the democratic deficit intensified Eurosceptic sentiments in various EU states. The von der Leyen Commission has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to social dialogue in Communications The European Green Deal<sup>7</sup> and A Strong Europe for Just Transition.<sup>8</sup> In May 2021 the Porto Social Commitment (signed by the Commission, Parliament, and the European Social Partners) and the Porto Declaration of the European Council highlighted the key role of social dialogue in post-COVID-19 recovery. The EPSR Action Plan presented in March 2021 contains a commitment from the Commission to introduce collective bargaining initiatives for the self-employed in 2021, and a Commission initiative to support social dialogue at the EU and national level is expected before the end of 2022.

A distinctive feature of the postcrisis period in the development of the ESD was a tilt towards “guidance.” As already noted, after the crisis of 2008–2010, without some pressure from the Commission, the employers’ organizations did not show any desire for meaningful interactions with trade unions at the European level [Ebbinghaus and Weishaupt, 2021]. On the other hand, the role and influence of the Commission on the ESD has been labeled as a “shadow of the hierarchy” in a number of research articles. According to this concept, the threat of unfavorable legislation from the Community is an important factor for the European social partners to restore autonomous dialogue and develop norms in an independent mode [Smismans, 2008]. As a rule, the process of

coordinating opinions on a draft law already submitted by the Commission takes place with a greater confrontation of the social partners. This ultimately results in the final directive texts being less ambitious than the original proposals [Sørensen et al., 2022].

Thus, the social partners have several tactics for participating in the development or adjustment of social policy in the EU. The path of autonomous intersectoral negotiations largely justifies its effectiveness at stages of the political cycle such as agenda setting and policy evaluation. For example, the 2002 and 2010 autonomous agreements on telework and inclusive labor markets were innovative in their content and proposals. The Parental Leave Agreement, revised in 2009 and adopted as a directive, largely paved the way for the subsequent empowerment of EU citizens with the adoption of the work–life balance directive (EU) 2019/1158.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the ESD forms the agenda for the further development of the social dimension at the communitarian level. However, the effectiveness of autonomous agreements is reduced due to different practices and procedures for their implementation at the national level. Difficulties remain with the implementation of the provisions of autonomous agreements in some new EU member states where there is often a lack of experience in autonomous negotiations among national labor associations and employers or insufficient coverage of social dialogue. The differentiated effect of the actions of autonomous agreements in the EU as a whole is also associated with differences in national models of industrial relations and legal systems of the member states, as well as with different amounts of changes necessary for their implementation.

The most tangible results of social dialogue at the EU level, in terms of the daily working life of workers and employers, are those agreements that have become legally binding throughout the EU Council directives. This is facilitated by both the ongoing control by the Commission over their implementation and enforcement in the member states and the very status of legal norms to which it is possible to appeal, for example, when protecting the labor rights of workers in those countries where national partners do not have sufficient competence to adopt binding norms. However, in recent years there has been a significant decrease in the interest of the Commission to propose autonomous agreements concluded within the framework of the ESD for consideration by the Council and their further consolidation as directives. In 2018, the Commission rejected a proposal to submit to the Council a 2015 agreement on informing and consulting civil servants and employees of central government administrations. This was the reason for a legal dispute

<sup>6</sup> Juncker J.-C. Setting Europe in Motion, Main Messages Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg, October 22, 2014. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_14\\_567](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_14_567).

<sup>7</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, *The European Green Deal*, Brussels, Dec. 11 (2019), COM(2019) 640 final.

<sup>8</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, *A Strong Social Europe For Just Transitions*, Brussels, Jan. 14 (2020), COM(2020) 14 final.

<sup>9</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of June 20, 2019, on work–life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, *Official Journal*, L 188, pp. 79–93.

between the European Federation of Trade Unions of Civil Servants (ETUC member), representing the interests of about eight million civil servants in all EU member states, and the European Commission,<sup>10</sup> as a result of which, on September 2, 2021, the EU Court of Justice issued a resonant decision in favor of the Commission's right to refuse to allow the European social partners to initiate a legislative procedure at the communitarian level [Dorssemont and Van Mallegem, 2021].

## CONCLUSIONS

Nearly 30 years ago, the Maastricht Treaty established procedures for the European Social Dialogue as part of a broader package of measures to strengthen the social dimension of the European integration. Thanks to the provisions of the TFEU, the European social partners have acquired the competence to become coregulators of industrial relations in the EU. Since the 2000s the social partners have taken a more active and independent stance and have focused on the conclusion of autonomous framework agreements and other “soft law” documents. The autonomy of the ESD implies not only the independence of the social partners in the formation of the agenda but also in its implementation, which, due to the difference in social models in the EU, does not always lead to the expected results. The most tangible effects of social dialogue at the EU level on the daily life of workers and employers are those agreements that have become legally binding across the EU through Council directives.

The “new start for social dialogue” initiated by the Juncker-led Commission is controversial. On the one hand, the supranational institutions of the European Union declaratively support the increased role of social partners which was demonstrated in 2021 both at the Social Summit in Porto and in the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. On the other hand, despite the fact that many of the Commission's initiatives are based on the provisions of previously adopted ESD agreements, the Commission avoids the direct participation of social partners in the decision-making process, relying only on their advisory role. In addition, the decision of the EU Court of Justice, which recognizes the right of the Commission to refuse to implement autonomous agreements within the framework of Union legislation, may negatively affect the future of the ESD. Thus, since its inception, the European Social Dialogue has evolved from a relationship of dependency on supranational institutions to a more autonomous position in the 2000s. However, after the crisis of 2008–2010, the role of the ESD has noticeably weak-

ened, it is becoming more and more “guided” with a more prominent role of the European Commission.

At a time when the European Union is on the path of a “double transition,” which will inevitably have side effects on the social sphere and the labor market and is also experiencing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the armed conflict in Ukraine, social partners can play an important role in maintaining the achieved level of social integration. Representing the interests of employers and trade unions in all sectors and EU member states, thanks to their internal structure and organization, ESD members are able to identify quickly the challenges and interests of both business and workers in response to crisis and transformational phenomena. In addition, the value of social dialogue at the EU level is due to the very process of negotiations and the exchange of views and information, which strengthens internal communication and trust of industrial relations participants.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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<sup>10</sup>Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of September 2, 2021, Case C-928/19 P, *European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) v. European Commission*.

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## Transformation of Right-Wing Populism in Italy in 2018–2022: From Sovereignism to Patriotism

E. S. Alekseenkova<sup>#</sup>

Center for Italian Studies, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

e-mail: [alekseenkovaes@gmail.com](mailto:alekseenkovaes@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**—The transformation of the discourse of right-wing populist parties in Italy from 2018 to 2022 is considered. Based on analysis of the programs and electoral rhetoric of the parties the Brothers of Italy, the League, and Forward Italy, the author concludes that Italian right-wing populism is becoming more moderate, replacing the concepts of *sovereignism* with “patriotism and conservatism” and rejecting Euroscepticism. Although nationalism is still characteristic of the right-wing parties in Italy, it is changing: a legalist approach to migrants is gradually replacing the ethnocultural and socioeconomic approaches. Populism remains the basic strategy of the right-wing parties, but the role of the main “enemy” of the Italian people is shifting from the European bureaucracy to the domestic mainstream Center–Left (i.e., the Democratic Party). The authoritarianism of the right-wing populists has undergone the least change in terms of ideological content between 2018 and 2022, but its importance has increased with the growing public demand for political stability and the increasing personalization of politics. This article contributes to the study of the phenomenon of right-wing populism.

**Keywords:** Italy, right-wing populism, discourse, Brothers of Italy, the League, Forward Italy, elections

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Domestic and foreign scientific studies used to pay great attention to the phenomenon of the emergence of Italian populism; the key features of populist parties and their typologies were considered in terms of the Right and Left ideological spectra and tactical or strategic orientation [Barabanov and Shibkova, 2015; Shibkova, 2019; Maslova, 2017; Zonova, 2019; Piccolino et al., 2022; Emanuele et al., 2021]. However, in general, in both the Russian and foreign literature, discussion continues about the key characteristics and typology of Italian right-wing parties, such as the Brothers of Italy, the League, and Forward Italy: To what extent can they be considered populist, radical, or center–right, what is the relationship between populism and “Euroscepticism” and “sovereignism”? Moreover, the early parliamentary elections in Italy on September 25, 2022, which ended with the victory of a coalition of right-wing parties (Brothers of Italy, the League, Forward Italy, and the Moderates), has provided an opportunity to raise the question of whether Italian populism has undergone a transformation and whether its ideological foundations or methods of political struggle have changed significantly enough compared to the previous elections in 2018? If such changes have taken place, what is their essence, and

what direction in the evolution of Italian populism can they indicate?

C. Mudde [Mudde, 2010] pointed to nationalism, populism as a strategy (populism per se), and authoritarianism as three key components of right-wing populism. As part of this work, we will trace the transformation of these three aspects of right-wing populism in Italy in 2018–2022. Critical discourse analysis will be used as a methodology for our research [Fairclough, 2010, p. 132]. In this case, we will focus on the analysis of key concepts and their relationships that form the basis of nationalism, the strategy of populism, and authoritarianism based on policy documents<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Il programma di Fratelli d’Italia, 2018. <https://www.fditrieste.it/2018/01/schema-programma-politiche-2018/>; Il programma di Fratelli d’Italia, 2019 (elezioni europee). chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.fratelli-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Programma-completo-1.pdf>; Il programma di Fratelli d’Italia 2022. <https://www.fratelli-italia.it/programma/>; Programma di governo Lega 2018. <https://www.leganord.org/component/phocadownload/category/5-elezioni?download=1514;programma-lega-salvini-premier-2018>; Lega. Programma di governo 2022. <https://legaonline.it/>; Per l’Italia. Accordo quadro di Programma per il governo di centrodestra 2022. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/[http://www.forzaitalia.it/speciali/PER\\_L\\_ITALIA\\_Accordo\\_quadro\\_di\\_programma\\_per\\_un\\_Governo\\_di\\_centrodestra.pdf](http://www.forzaitalia.it/speciali/PER_L_ITALIA_Accordo_quadro_di_programma_per_un_Governo_di_centrodestra.pdf); Programma elettorale Forza Italia 2018. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/[http://www.forza-italia.it/speciali/Programma\\_centrodestra\\_condiviso\\_10\\_PUNTI.pdf](http://www.forza-italia.it/speciali/Programma_centrodestra_condiviso_10_PUNTI.pdf); Programma Forza Italia 2022. [https://www.corriere.it/elezioni/22\\_settembre\\_25/programma-forza-italia-fd4d201a-3b5a-11ed-8e93-4aa9ade4f3e7.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/elezioni/22_settembre_25/programma-forza-italia-fd4d201a-3b5a-11ed-8e93-4aa9ade4f3e7.shtml).

<sup>#</sup> Elena Sergeevna Alekseenkova, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), is a Leading Researcher and Head of the Center for Italian Studies at the RAS Institute of Europe.

and speeches and interviews of the leaders of the three key political parties in Italy (League, Brothers of Italy, Forward Italy) in 2018–2022.

The key hypothesis of this study is that right-wing populism in Italy is transforming from a rather radical form to a more moderate stand. This hypothesis is based on three sub-hypotheses: (1) although nationalism is still characteristic of the right-wing parties in Italy, it has changed towards greater inclusiveness: a legalist approach to migrants is gradually replacing ethnocultural and socioeconomic approaches; (2) populism remains the basic strategy of right-wing parties, but, compared to 2018, it relies less and less on Euro-scepticism and sovereignism; and (3) the authoritarianism of the Right has undergone the smallest changes in terms of ideological content in the period from 2018 to 2022, but its importance has increased with the growing public demand for political stability and an increase in the personalization of politics.

### RIGHT-WING NATIONALISM: LEGALISM INSTEAD OF NATIVISM?

Nationalism, understood as the ideological mobilization of ethnic or national identity for political purposes, is an integral feature of right-wing populism, along with strategic populism proper (populism per se) and authoritarianism [Mudde, 2010].

A prerequisite for the process of operationalization of nationalism is the “creation” of a nation—outlining the circle of individuals who, according to certain criteria, are included in the nation or, on the contrary, excluded from it. This process of “demarcation of boundaries” between “us” and “them” is of decisive character for right-wing populism: without it, any discursive strategy of populism is a priori unrealizable since it is not clear on whose behalf to conduct a dialogue and build the very opposition between the “people” and the “elites” on whose perception the narrative is aimed, and whose interests are labeled as “national interest.” As rightly noted by P.V. Oskolkov [Oskolkov, 2019], right-wing populism is always a combination of anti-elitism with nativism (nationalism).

Setting the goal of delineating the boundaries of the nation, right-wing populism is always exclusive [Vainshtein, 2017]; i.e., it provides for a clear designation of those groups that cannot become part of the “people.” Right-wing populists in different countries approach this task in different ways, using the principle of nativism (the fact of birth) as a criterion of exclusivity, or, for example, the ability and willingness of newly arrived immigrants to integrate into society.

In the camp of the Italian right-wing parties, significant changes occurred by 2022 in the understanding of “us” and “them.” If we compare the election programs of the Brothers of Italy in 2019 and 2022, we can clearly see that the “other” has changed: in 2019,

it was the ethnocultural immigrant claiming the social benefits of the state. That is why the principle of *prima gli italiani* was introduced, limiting access to social benefits solely to ethnic Italians. In 2022, under the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, which has led to a new wave of refugees in the EU, the ethnocultural factor is gradually losing its significance, while the socioeconomic factor remains: the right-wing parties are ready to accept the “other” if he is a refugee from war, while economic migrants looking for a better life remain unacceptable. However, the categories of migrants the shortage of which was obvious during the pandemic can be admitted; in particular, the Brothers of Italy have proposed “green corridors” for agricultural workers. The Islamic factor is practically no longer mentioned in policy documents, and the securitization of Islam is noted to a lesser extent. For example, in 2019, the program of Brothers of Italy declared war on “Islamization”: the construction of places of worship and media and cultural activities funded by “fundamentalist countries” were prohibited; the fight against “integralist proselytism,” which allegedly contributed to the spread terrorism, was proclaimed. The same program said *no* to Turkey’s accession to the EU, proposed limiting the number of foreign students in the classroom, and included an integration policy to avoid the formation of ghettos. The 2022 program only briefly declares that Europe is the birthplace of Judeo–Christian values and declares the fight against “all forms of anti-Semitism, racism, and Islamic integralism.” In fact, only the legalist approach remained at the heart of “nation-building” by 2022: a migrant can be ethnically anyone, but he is accepted if he entered legally. While in 2019 it was stated that immigration is possible according to quotas and only for “those nationalities whose representatives demonstrate a readiness to integrate and do not pose a threat in the field of security and terrorism,” in 2022 the division of nationalities into ready and not ready to integrate no longer exists. The measures proposed by the Brothers of Italy in 2022 are aimed precisely at promoting the legalization of the migration flows, namely, strict joint control of EU borders, the arrangement of primary reception centers for immigrants (so-called hotspots) in the countries of origin to consider issuing refugee status already there, and signing agreements with countries of origin on the prevention of illegal emigration and repatriation. Thus, only illegal immigrants become “others” in 2022. The principle of *primi gli italiani* has disappeared from policy documents. However, at the same time, *ius soli* and all its possible versions are denied as facilitating the possibility of obtaining Italian citizenship.

The League retained a tougher and more detailed approach to immigrants in its program. In particular, the 2022 document proposes the return of the infamous “Salvini decrees,” a sea blockade of ports for vessels of human rights organizations, the introduc-

tion of so-called “codes” regulating the actions of NGOs, and the deportation of migrants who have committed crimes. The League proposes to “take in those fleeing war, repatriate economic migrants, ensure real integration for those who receive refugee status, and prevent Italy from remaining Europe’s main refugee camp.” M. Salvini also says *no* to *ius soli* and argues that citizenship should be the result of successful integration, not a condition for it, requiring migrants to “respect the rules and values, culture, and principles of the Western world.” The League insists that immigration must be “skilled” and clearly meet the needs of the labor market. Thus, of all the Italian Rightists, Salvini retains the most rigid approach to immigration issues, demonstrating the most “protective” approach to the concept of citizenship and nation.

Important in the program provisions of the right-wing parties is still a protective approach to the questions of the value and cultural identity of the Italian people. Declaring allegiance to the Judeo-Christian tradition, supporting the traditional family, banning LGBT propaganda, supporting fertility, and fighting the emigration of young people are measures targeted at preventing the negative impact of globalization processes on the value-based and cultural heritage of the country and at preventing the erosion of national identity.

#### TRANSFORMING THE POPULIST STRATEGY: REDEFINING THE ENEMY

The second element of right-wing populism, as Mudde defines it, is populism proper as a strategy, i.e., the definition of the “people’s will” in opposition to the will and interests of the “elites,” and articulation of the conflict. The discursive approach to populism considers this element to be key [Laclau, 2005]. The main concepts here are the concepts of *national interest*, which is the “will of the people,” and *sovereignty* as the ability to defend these very “national interests,” actualizing the will of the people. Let us see how the relationships between these concepts were built into the policy documents of the Brothers of Italy, the League, and Forward Italy in 2018–2022.

In 2018, the Brothers of Italy, in fact, did not have a full-fledged program—instead, there were only 12 brief slogans. However, among them there were two clearly defining “the enemies”—the institutions of the EU: one was about “defending national sovereignty from European technocrats,” and the second about protecting the national labor, production, agriculture, and “Made in Italy” products from unfair EU directives. Then, in 2019, the word *sovereignists* (*sovraniisti*) appeared on the party’s logo, offering a more extended version of the argument in favor of protecting national sovereignty. The EU is criticized as “a supranational entity ruled by unelected bureaucrats and technocrats, who impose their decisions from above on the peoples

of Europe.” Instead, a “European Confederation of Free and Sovereign Nation States” and the restoration of the priority of the Constitution and national legislation over the communitarian law are proposed. The program also claimed that Europe had become an “amusement park” for Germany and France, which used EU institutions in their own interests, to the detriment of the interests of other states and, in particular, Italy. The Brothers of Italy called for intolerance to interference in the internal affairs of the country and “hostile actions” against its national interests. The EU and Germany, in particular, were accused of imposing austerity policies; the EU institutions were accused of acting in the interests of international TNCs and their lobbies, which resulted in a labor market crisis in Italy, the ruin of small and medium-sized enterprises, and the transfer of production to third countries. The single, euro currency, again beneficial only to the Germans, was declared another cause of national troubles. The protection of “Made in Italy” was called “a priority national interest,” as well as the support of fertility and the family, which, from the point of view of the Brothers of Italy, did not receive sufficient attention at the EU level. In order to strengthen the position of Italy in the international arena, it was proposed to introduce popular presidential elections.

However, in the party program for 2022, the “sovraniist” rhetoric turned out to be almost completely emasculated. Even the party logo has changed: the signature “Sovranists and Conservatives” has been replaced with “Patriots and Conservatives.” Note that the word *patriotism* was absent in the programs of the parties in 2018 and 2019. In terms of EU reform, the 2022 agenda provides only a modest “restart of the European integration system in favor of a Europe of the fatherlands, based on the interests of the peoples and able to cope with modern challenges.” Italy is invited to become again a “protagonist in Europe and the world” (an idea that has been heard more than once since the mid-1990s), and this proposal took the last, 25th point of the program of the Brothers of Italy. National interest in 2022 is defined in the program of the Brothers of Italy as “protecting the interests of the industrial and production system of the country,” and to this end, Italy should play a more active role in the EU discussion of the Fit for 55 package.

Thus, EU institutions, the single currency, and the norms of the European Union are no longer seen as contrary to the national interests of the country, and the program does not suggest any methods to counteract them. It retains a high degree of protectionism characteristic of the Right and an emphasis on national competitiveness and attaches great attention to conservative values and left-wing socioeconomic ideas, but the confrontation with the EU is practically leveled, thereby reducing the degree of radicalism of the proposed policy. Instead of EU institutions, the anger of the Brothers of Italy in the 2022 program is transferred to the “internal enemy,” namely, to the

Center–Left, who have been in power for more than ten years and have driven the country into a severe economic crisis. That is why the program provisions and electoral rhetoric of the Brothers of Italy positioned the elections of 2022 as a milestone, a turning point, which should mark the end of the era of technical governments and finally allow the formation of a “political government” based on the legitimacy of the popular vote. The concept of *sovereignty* is mentioned in the program only once in the form of a quote from the Constitution—“Sovereignty belongs to the people”—and precisely in connection with the illegitimate stay of the Center–Left in power, which was the result not of a popular will but of “behind the scenes games” (*giochi di palazzo*).

The anti-European discourse of the League has also undergone a significant transformation between 2018 and 2022. Thus, in particular, in the 2018 program, in addition to the thesis about the illegitimacy of the EU institutions, consisting of bureaucrats and speculators, there was a call for the EU to return to the state that preceded the conclusion of the Maastricht agreements. It was argued that Italy would be ready to remain in the community only after the revision of all the fundamental documents of the European Union. The euro was declared the main cause of the country’s economic decline. The primacy of national law and the return of national sovereignty were assumed in the following areas: monetary and macroeconomic, and legislative, and in matters of border protection (including the abolition of the Schengen and Dublin agreements). The preservation of sovereignty was declared a national interest, which was to be followed by the country’s foreign policy, which assumed an independent policy in Libya, openness to cooperation with Russia, and maintaining a privileged partnership with the administration of D. Trump, whose fight against Islamic extremism and “aggressive trade and political penetration of China” fully met the national interests of Italy.

The 2022 League program recognizes that Italy’s sovereignty is being eroded by supranational institutions, primarily the EU. However, as a fight against this phenomenon, there is no question of any revision of the EU treaties; instead, it is proposed only to “strengthen the presence” of the Italian leadership in Brussels (in particular, to restore the Ministry of EU Affairs, abolished in 1987) and to return “to the center of the European Union the principle of subsidiarity, which Europe has neglected in favor of solutions imposed at the supranational level to the detriment of states, bringing political decisions closer to citizens disillusioned with an increasingly bureaucratic and distant Europe.” Thus, in the League’s opinion, the principle of subsidiarity and increased representation should help solve the problem of erosion of national sovereignty in the EU. Through negotiations in Brussels, Italy should achieve a review of those EU decisions that, according to the League, are detrimental to

the national interests of the country, including the European Green Deal, Fit for 55, and a number of regulatory norms and practices in the field of agriculture. In the same way, it is necessary to influence EU foreign trade policy to promote Italian technologies and products. Similarly, through negotiations, it stipulated the revision of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, approved in 2021 before the start of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, which entailed the most severe economic consequences for Italy (which the Brothers of Italy also insist on). Another important element in protecting national sovereignty, according to the League, should be the preservation of the principle of consensus decision making by the EU Council, the destruction of which will become a real opportunity to exclude individual countries from the process of making the most important EU foreign policy decisions and turn the European Union into a form of oligarchy.

As for national interests from the point of view of foreign policy, the program of the League in 2022 does not come into conflict with the EU priorities either. The failures in the implementation of Italy’s foreign policy goals in the Mediterranean are blamed on the Center–Left and not on external forces in the EU: it was the Left that “sought to Europeanize foreign decisions with huge and obvious damage to Italy, which, on the contrary, is interested in creating a network of bilateral agreements with the economies of the Mediterranean countries.” Like the Brothers of Italy, the League calls on the country to become a protagonist on the international stage. The idea of Italy as a mediator of international conflicts and as a representative of NATO and the EU in interaction with third countries is traditionally characteristic of the foreign policy of Rome.

Thus, it is obvious that the Euroscepticism of the League has not completely disappeared but has significantly transformed towards a more moderate view—primarily in terms of methods for strengthening national sovereignty, the main of which is “negotiations” within the EU.

Significant changes along the Euroscepticism–Eurooptimism axis were also introduced into the program provisions of the Forward Italy party. S. Berlusconi’s 2018 program said *no* to austerity, excessive regulation, and bureaucracy and called, like the League, for the revision of the EU treaties, the redistribution of Italy’s payments to the EU budget, the priority of national law over EU law (“restoration of sovereignty”), and the protection of “Made in Italy” and agricultural producers. The 2022 agenda is completely different. Even its title, which can be translated literally as “Today as Never Before—the Choice of the Camp” (*Oggi piu che mai una scelta di campo*), underlines the priority of the international agenda and the desire to emphasize the choice of Italy—together with the EU and NATO—in the confrontation between Russia and the so-called “collective West.”

The very first lines speak of adherence to the liberal, Christian, pro-European tradition and values and principles of Western civilization. There is also the main slogan, “Italy is fully part of Europe, the Atlantic Alliance, and the West. More Italy in Europe, more Europe in the world,” which became the first point of the common program of the center-right coalition in the 2022 elections. There is not a single mention of “sovereignty” or “national interests” in the program. The section on foreign policy and defense is called “We are Atlanticists and Europeanists.” It proposes the promotion of a common foreign policy of the EU, a transition from a consensus vote to a qualified majority in the European Council (where Forward Italy is fundamentally at odds with the League), the creation of a European army, a revision of the Stability Pact, the mandatory distribution of immigrants by quotas within the EU, support for NATO, strengthening relations with the United States, the European “Marshall Plan” for Africa, etc.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, even in 2018–2019, Berlusconi’s attitude to the phenomenon of sovereigntism was very ambivalent. For example, in a 2019 interview, he argued,

Sovereignty is a deception that needs to be abandoned, it is a stupid idea, and those who believe in it are stupid. A nationalist and sovereign Europe was the cause of two world wars and tens of millions of deaths. Do we want to return? No. With sovereignty, we will end Le Pen in France, who has many votes but cannot govern.

In 2022, he confirmed his thesis:

It is not difficult for me to repeat this. Our Center–Right have nothing to do with the far-right components that exist in other countries, but in Italy they, fortunately, do not matter, because we have many democratic Rightists. Our presence [in the center-right coalition—*E.A.*], I repeat, is a guarantee of the democratic, pro-European, and Atlantic vocation of the coalition. Otherwise, we would not be there.<sup>2</sup>

The common thesis that the party shares with its coalition partners is now only the desire for maximum subsidiarity within the EU:

We want Europe to be a community governed by democratic principles, with the direct election of the president of the EU Commission by European citizens and overcoming the principle of unanimity in the European Council. We want to move towards a model based on subsidiarity, which guarantees maximum unity and at the same time maximum autonomy of individual countries, as is the case in the United

States. Finally, we want Europe to join NATO and the West without hesitation.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, we can state that by now Forward Italy has almost completely abandoned Euroscepticism.

The common program of the center–right coalition of 2022 also clearly shows a decrease in the level of Euroscepticism. There is not a single mention of sovereignty in it, and the concept of national interest occurs only once, where the program dwells on the “protection of national interests when discussing European legislative dossiers, including in the light of changes in the international context, with special emphasis on ecological transition.” The common program of the Center–Right begins with words borrowed from Forward Italy: “Italy is fully part of Europe, the Atlantic Alliance, and the West. More Italy in Europe, more Europe in the world.” It also expresses full commitment to the process of European integration with the prospect of becoming a union more political than bureaucratic; the desire to reform the Stability and Growth Pact is expressed. It declares compliance with the obligations assumed in the Atlantic Alliance, including in matters of defense appropriations, support for Ukraine, and any diplomatic initiative aimed at resolving the conflict.

It is also interesting to note that the foreign policy agenda is included in the first paragraph of the common program, which is not observed in the programs of the parties themselves. It is obvious that this step was aimed at “calming” Italy’s European and overseas partners that even with the Center–Right in power, Rome will not change its Euro-Atlantic course. Given the program narrative and pre-election discourse of these same parties on the eve of the 2018 national elections and the 2019 European Parliament elections, Brussels and Washington had every reason to worry about how Italy would behave in the most difficult times of an armed conflict in the heart of Europe and tough confrontation with Russia. However, Russia’s military operation in Ukraine became a factor that radically changed the position not only of official Rome but also of right-wing populists, both in relation to Moscow and in relation to Western partners. Russia’s actions were perceived as aggression and an unjustified violation of international law, and unity with the West and the EU was a response that actually crossed out all previous years of confrontation with Brussels and the European bureaucracy. Therefore, on the eve of the 2022 elections, the Center–Right did everything to convince international partners of loyalty to Italy’s traditional alliances. On September 22, 2022, G. Meloni declared “support for Ukraine without any hesitation or doubts.” She also said, “We believe that Italy’s national interest today is not to appear as a weak link of the West but to respect fully

<sup>2</sup> L’Europa cammina con noi. Intervista al Cav: “Il sovranismo è un’idea stupida,” *Il Foglio*, Aug. 19 (2022). <https://www.ilfoglio.it/politica/2022/08/19/news/1-europa-cammina-con-noi-intervista-al-cav-il-sovranismo-e-un-idea-stupida-4339987/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

our international alliances.”<sup>4</sup> *Thus, while in 2018 the national interest indicated in the programs of the Right was the revision of all EU treaties, today it has been transformed into the task of “not appearing as a weak link of the West.”*

The persistence of the conflict between the “people” and the “elites” in the discourses of center–right parties indicates that they are still committed to the populist strategy (populism per se)—with the only difference being that, compared to 2018, the European bureaucracy has ceased to be their main target: the role of the main “enemy” of the Italian people has actually been completely transferred to the Center–Left, in particular, to the Democratic Party, with which the work of “technical governments” and all the unpopular economic measures implemented by them in previous years were inextricably linked. It seems that the main reasons for this transformation were (1) Italy’s dependence on EU financial assistance in the implementation of the economic recovery plan and (2) the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, which contributed to the growth of pan-European solidarity.

#### IS RIGHT-WING POPULISM AUTHORITARIAN IN ITALY?

There is no unambiguous opinion in the scientific literature about the extent to which right-wing populism is authoritarian, nor about whether this characteristic refers to the populist project of the future society rather than to the populist parties themselves and the style of leadership. For example, Mudde calls authoritarianism one of the three key elements of right-wing populism, referring to their ideas about a tightly controlled society. E. Laclau [Laclau, 2005] speaks of the inevitability of authoritarianism due to a populist leader’s function of the aggregator and articulator of public opinions and sentiments. Other researchers [Baranov, 2015] speak of a special psychotype of the populist electorate, which determines their choice in favor of a strong leader. The authoritarian component of populism is especially emphasized by the concept of P. Norris and R. Inglehart [Norris, Inglehart, 2019], emphasizing that right-wing populists advocate tight control in the security sector, display xenophobia, call for control over moral values, etc.

If we consider from this point of view Italian right-wing populism in dynamics from 2018 to 2022, we will see that all the above elements of authoritarianism are somehow inherent in it and remain relevant, but the balance between them changes depending on public sentiments and expectations, as well as the nature of domestic political and external challenges.

<sup>4</sup> Meloni: “Siamo al fianco degli alleati, niente crepe nell’Occidente,” Agi.it, Sep. 22 (2022). <https://www.agi.it/politica/news/2022-09-22/ucraina-meloni-a-fianco-alleati-no-italia-anello-debole-18174942/>. Cited September 22, 2022.

Perhaps the most stable characteristic of these parties is that all of them—the League, the Brothers of Italy, and Forward Italy—are parties of the leader type, headed by leaders with fairly great charisma. Moreover, over the past five years, the degree of personalization of power within the parties has increased. All three parties practice direct communication with voters; actively use social networks, new technologies, and the so-called “square diplomacy”; constantly exploit the image of “a person of the people”; etc.

Also quite stable is the presence of security-related issues in both program provisions and the rhetoric of the right-wing parties. These issues range from problems caused by illegal immigration to bills aimed at protecting housing, the right to self-defense, reforming law enforcement and the penitentiary system, etc. That is why Salvini became Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2018 and sought to do it again, after the elections in 2022. The same range of issues includes the securitization of immigration and religion, in particular Islam, which we spoke about above. All these elements remain relevant for the right-wing parties in 2022.

The presence of proposals for reforming the Constitution of the country towards presidentialism in the programs of the right-wing parties also persists. Many internal and external opponents of the Italian right populist see this as an authoritarian threat. Indeed, in both 2018 and 2022, one of the key pillars of the center–right agenda was institutional reform. The society’s demand for a more stable political system without annual political crises; the desire to gain more “responsible” political leadership; and the general trend towards the personalization of power, which was entrenched during the pandemic [Alekseenkova, 2020], have become important factors in Italian politics. The level of trust in political and administrative institutions in Italy has not exceeded 20–30% for more than a decade [Ladini, 2021]. At the same time, the level of personal trust in many “professionals” who came to the government during the pandemic, including Prime Minister M. Draghi himself, turned out to be very high (more than 65%).

In response to this demand for the personalization of power, the Rightists propose the transformation of the political system towards presidentialism: the introduction of universal direct presidential elections and the electability of the prime minister. According to Meloni, the lack of political stability is the main source of the country’s economic problems. The League’s program develops the populist thesis about the loss of the people’s influence on decisions, which are often the result of collusions between parties or a political situation. Direct presidential elections should increase responsibility for the decisions made and thus contribute to the growth of trust. As a successfully working model, Salvini proposes to use the experience of the elected heads of regions and communes of Italy.

A popularly elected president must also unite the nation, which still has many rifts within it. Indeed, public opinion polls show that more than 80% of supporters of the Center–Right and more than 60% of the electorate of the Democratic Party would welcome the introduction of direct popular elections for the president of the country.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the view of the Italian Rightists themselves, presidentialism does not mean at all a movement towards authoritarianism, but, above all, an increase in the responsibility of the leader. In addition, the risk of authoritarianism, from their point of view, should be offset by the consolidation of real regional autonomy—maximum horizontal subsidiarity, which fully meets the task of “bringing power to the people,” direct democracy, and citizens’ participation in government.

Regional autonomy, introduced in the 1970s and continued through the constitutional reform of 2001, has not been fully implemented thus far. From 2001 to 2017, in a number of regions of the country, referendums were held on granting greater autonomy (Lombardy, Veneto); however, this process has never been completed. The League’s program assumes “federal regionalism” based on the principle of differentiated autonomy of the regions. The idea of greater autonomy still appeals to those regions of Italy (mostly northern) that believe that they can be more successful if subsidiarity is maximized and central intervention is minimized. The success of some of them in the fight against the pandemic has further strengthened their belief.

As in any study of populism, it is rather difficult to say to what extent the authoritarianism of the Right was a response to the public demand for greater stability and accountability of power, and to what extent this demand was formed under the influence of the populist discourse about the need for institutional reforms. Nevertheless, for several years now, researchers have noted the fatigue of Italian society from the permanent governmental leapfrog and, as a response to this, the demand for stability, the personalization of power, and its accessibility for ordinary citizens. However, dissatisfaction with the “emergency” management style that was formed in Italy under the influence of the global economic crisis of 2008–2011, and then the Covid-19 pandemic, and the energy crisis of 2022 is also recorded as a countertrend. Note that criticism of this second trend also comes from the same right-wing populists<sup>6</sup> who accuse the Prime Minister of usurping power and removing parliament from the process of making key decisions.

<sup>5</sup> Sablone, L. (2021) Gli italiani vogliono il presidenzialismo, *Il Giornale*, Dec. 13 (2021). <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/sondaggio-sul-presidenzialismo-lelezione-diretta-piace-74-1995578.html>.

<sup>6</sup> La lettera di Salvini che accusa il governo sull'emergenza, *Today.it*, Sep. 6 (2020). <https://www.today.it/politica/lettera-salvini.html> (cited October 10, 2022).

Given the above, it is certainly appropriate to talk about the presence of authoritarian elements in the discourse of right-wing populists, as well as about the corresponding demand of society, but there is also a countertendency and it is deeply rooted in Italian political culture that rejects any attempt to reduce pluralism and any unification, be it either local or regional.

## CONCLUSIONS

The documented transformation of right-wing populist discourse, indicating a rejection of hard forms of nationalism, Euroscepticism, and sovereignty, seems to have allowed the Center–Right to increase the level of electoral support. Right-wing populism in Italy is becoming more moderate. The emasculation of the word *sovereignty* and the increasingly frequent replacement of it with the terms *patriotism* and *national interests*; the transfer of “blame” for Italy’s economic and geopolitical difficulties from Brussels to the Center–Left; the cancellation of calls for the revision of European treaties; and even a more moderate, “legalist,” narrative in relation to migrants, combined with the promotion of traditional values, allowed the Right to win the support of 44% of Italian citizens, despite the rather harsh rhetoric of the Center–Left, trying to present the Right as the heirs of fascism and the main supporters of Putin and Orbán in the EU. It is also worth noting the strengthening of the “left” component in the discourse of the right-wing parties in the form of economic measures to support families and enterprises and protectionism for “Made in Italy”—a trend that many researchers spoke about back in 2017 [Global right-wing rebellion, 2017] and that is gaining momentum due to the deterioration of the international economic situation against the backdrop of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict. “Losers from globalization” [Baranov, 2015, p. 26; Pogorel’skaya, 2004] in today’s situation turn out to be “losers from deglobalization,” which has intensified under the influence of the Russian–Ukrainian crisis.

Seeing the sole lifeline in the EU and NATO, right-wing populism in Italy has directed all criticism towards the “internal enemy.” Having completely abandoned “nonsystemic” initiatives in the form of withdrawing from the EU treaties or the euro area, it is increasingly drifting towards “corrective to democracy” [Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012]. By reducing the degree of radicalism, right-wing populists are building up support for the electorate that is not ready to face a new global crisis. However, it seems premature to talk about whether this transformation is tactical or strategic, and whether the remaining contradictions between Italy and the EU will once again become a reason for raising the discourse on national sovereignty in the event of a further deterioration in the international economic environment.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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