

## REALITY AND THEORY

# ‘UKRAINE CRISIS’ AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY ALTERNATIVES

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### Abstract

The political and social dynamics in Ukraine since late 2013 have brought about a significant challenge both for Russia and for the “collective West”. It led to the growing need to reexamine the structure of their relations at two levels: between Russia and Ukraine as well as within a broader community of nations, which includes also the U.S., West European countries and China. The aim of the article is to assess the room for strategic deliberations in Moscow. It starts with the analysis of the recent crisis within Ukraine and identifies the growing role of outside powers after the change of leadership in Kiev. It specifically focuses on American support to the new Ukrainian authorities and the attempts of major European states to negotiate a détente between Moscow and Kiev. At the same time it studies the core, underlying cultural and identity roots of instability in Ukraine. The same factors, primarily related to the linguistic divisions affected the situation in Crimea, however, in this case they had an even stronger effect. The author, therefore, presents the historical developments, which created the Crimean problem in Russian-Ukrainian relations, and the depth of the current geographic and logistical issues for Moscow, related to its reintegration. The article also examines broader patterns of economic and political relations between Russia and its European partners, which help to explain the different dynamic in policies of various Western powers. While Germany, France and some other EU members have extensive relations with Moscow and are dependent on its energy supplies, they demonstrated greater restraint in comparison with the U.S. However, Washington’s uncompromising stance demanded Russian leadership to search for alternatives in its strategic orientations. The realignment with China represented an obvious although not unproblematic choice. Today, it is of crucial importance for Russia to broaden its political and economic base in the Pacific. In this regard it stays behind China, where it positions itself as the guardian of free-trade principles, while the U.S. is seeking to construct preferential economic relations with like-minded nations in Asia.

### Keywords:

Ukrainian crisis; Minsk agreements; Normand format; Euro-Atlantic community; reintegration of Crimea; war in Donbass; Russian pivot to Asia.

The strategic situation influences Russian foreign policy in unexpected ways. On February 22, 2014 a coup d’état took place in Ukraine, which brought new people to power and exposed problems that determined the agenda for Russian-Ukrainian, Postsoviet-Eurasian, European and world politics as a whole.

In November 2013 the government in Kiev decided to postpone the decision about an association with the European Union. Parliament did not agree with this decision and was supported by the people who had taken up arms. President V. Yanukovich came under fire — from different directions. Having de facto lost

power – although still endowed with the constitutional legal power – he was forced to leave Kiev. For some time, power passed into the hands of prime minister N. Azarov, but within a few days the Verkhovna Rada, quite up to the challenge, formed a new government led by A. Yatsenyuk. The latter practically proclaimed a new state regime as well as a new domestic and foreign policy.

What was Russia's main interest in the events in Kiev? Obviously, it was preventing the collapse of relations of interdependence between Moscow and the USA, Western Europe, and China, which depended on the maintenance of a fragile balance of power. In the post-bipolar configuration of the world order „Middle Europe“ had become the main area of conflicts of interests: in the 1990s and 2000s former allies were literally „rushing into“ the integration space of the West and the „fraternal“ countries among the former Soviet republics are – with ever faster strides – „worming“ themselves into its military and political orbit as well as its value system. One of the consequences of this asynchrony is that because of the historical proximity of their misfortunes to Russia a number of countries are now demanding more time for re-orientation and a slower pace of integration into the West.

# 1

Ukraine has always played an important part in the Russian-Western scenario. Because of its close proximity to Russia and its remoteness from the practical problems of world politics it has always solved the problem of international self-presentation in its own way. Independence as the principle doctrine in foreign politics was absolutized by V. Yanukovich, but in the end it turned out incompatible with the demands of the moment. Unable to understand where the

direct threat was coming from, the former president overlooked its graveness.

A. Yatsenyuk, who took the initiative when there was no legitimate power, set about solving long-standing, painful problems with remarkable vigor. At the beginning of spring 2014 the main question for him was by which scenario Ukraine was to join the European Union. The price of choosing „the way west“ seemed secondary. In the meantime, the situation proved that all was not quite well – Eastern and Southeastern Ukraine (Donbas and Crimea) had already been a catastrophe waiting to happen. It turned out that not everybody was ready to vote for the new power. The situation was on the brink of exploding and under the conditions of a new regime it did explode.

But it was not not the events in Ukraine itself which dictated the way the crisis was developing – the USA's position played the most important role in this. In this context A. Yatsenyuk's visit to the White House on March 12, 2014 was an indisputable success for Ukrainian diplomacy. President Barack Obama resolutely and openly declared his support of the new Ukrainian government<sup>1</sup>. The same route of a forced rapprochement with the collective West was taken by P. Poroshenko after winning the presidential elections in May 2014. On September 17 he visited Washington, where he was assured of US support once again<sup>2</sup>. P. Poroshenko began to gradually take away from A. Yatsenyuk the power he had appropriated.

Russia had been watching events impatiently and drew its conclusions. The most important question was that of Crimea. This question was solved by the composition of the electorate which was dominated by ethnic Russians: 58,5% of the population (Ukrainians – 24,3%, Crimean Tatars – 12,1%)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Remarks by President Obama and Ukraine Prime Minister Yatsenyuk after Bilateral Meeting. March 12, 2014. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/12/remarks-president-obama-and-ukraine-prime-minister-yatsenyuk-after-bilat>

<sup>2</sup>Remarks by President Obama and President Poroshenko of Ukraine After Bilateral Meeting. September 18, 2014. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/18/remarks-president-obama-and-president-poroshenko-ukraine-after-bilateral>

<sup>3</sup>Population size and structure of the Autonomous Republic Crimea according to the results of the All Ukrainian census of 2001. State Statistics Service of Ukraine. URL: <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/crimea>

There was no problem with a common or working language in Crimea.

The second question – about the status of southeastern Ukraine – was solved differently. The Ukrainians in Donbas who had started to rally against the government on April 6, 2014 spoke Russian and considered Russian their second native language. The uprising that had started in Donetsk eventually spread to Luhansk. The two regions later formed the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. The immediate reasons provoking the uprising included a subjective element – the fact that V. Yanukovich, whose political career had started in Donbas, had been exiled. It goes without saying that at the same time Russian and Ukrainian history, the circumstances of the origins of the two countries as well as the twists and turns of their transformation, the experience of coexistence of the two countries, the dualism in culture and spirituality, and the language problem, the peculiar qualities of the new Ukraine after the collapse of monarchical Russia and the ambiguous role Poland played in the formation of Ukraine played a substantial role in the progression of events.

In the context of the formation of a national statehood the accession of the „bilingual“ regions of Luhansk and Donetsk to Ukraine was the most acute historic-cultural problem. Central Ukraine (central not so much in a territorial as in a political sense) accepted the compromise of Russian as a common language and Ukrainian as the official language. However, in the question of the unity of the country the „Ukrainian-Polish“ lands played a key role. The „reunification“ of the Ukraine in the 20th century was essentially the unification of the “Western” and “Eastern” parts of the country. However, the cultural representation of both regions implies an exclusion of a number of territories belonging to them geographically. In this context “Western Ukraine” in particular is defined by excluding two regions which differ from it in terms of identity (Transcarpathian and Bukovina Regions).

Bilingualism is not a problem anymore in Western Ukraine when defined in this way. Neither is it a significant problem in the context of national identification in the central

regions of the country – the figures of A. Yatsenyuk and P. Poroshenko (both come from Kryvyi Rih) testify to this. Neither of them is of “pure Ukrainian” descent, both come from the central part of the country.

In the meantime Donetsk and Luhansk speak two languages – Russian and Ukrainian, and advocate for a phased approach, for allowing Donbas the time it needs in order to overcome its bilingualism. The situation of the Russian language in the context of Ukraine's internal crisis is the key problem in maintaining the unity of the country. What language should a person born today in Donbas speak, if they have to defend their interests in Kiev tomorrow, speaking Ukrainian? Finding the solution to the problem of language priority took the form of an open battle of will between the volunteers of the two regions on the one hand and the regular Ukrainian army on the other hand. The result is a conflict which has been going on for over a year now.

The idea of „going to the people“ has taken a strong hold on the minds of the young generation not only in „pure“ Western and Central Ukraine but also of a significant part of the country's Eastern parts' youth. They want to go and try to adapt to life as it is. But now the main problem, the “built-in” problem of Ukrainian society arises, which the current conflict has turned the spotlight on. “Going to the people” in France, Germany or Britain and talking to a provincial Frenchman, German or Brit in “their” language is not the same as in Ukraine where there's always the possibility that you turn out “a little Ukrainian” but “a little not quite Ukrainian”. Most Western Europeans will not be able to understand this situation.

The European Union is becoming aware of the nature of this problem – more or less that is. Germany and France are trying to set the tone in this matter. For over a year now A. Merkel and F. Hollande have been trying to convince Russians and Ukrainians to come to an arrangement.

On February 7, 2015 it looked like by and large the conflict had been put on hold. Under the auspices of German Chancellor Angela Merkel the “Normandy Format” – France

(Francois Hollande), Russia (V. Putin) and the Ukraine (P. Poroshenko) – came together for a special meeting on February 11-12, 2015 in Minsk. With the host of this meeting, Belarus President A. Lukashenko, who the previous months had been maintaining normal relations with Ukraine, they had the quorum (the presence of four concerned leaders). The parties agreed on the terms of disarmament in the conflict zone and promised to comply with the agreement<sup>4</sup>.

## 2

The most significant issue for Russia – the status of Crimea – is rather peripheral in Russian-Ukrainian relations these days, although from the standpoint of the larger part of Europe or the USA this problem is still one of the most important. In Soviet history and before that in the history of the Russian empire the question whether the peninsula belonged to Russia or the Ukraine was never conceived of as a political dilemma, it seemed irrelevant. Why then did the current ethnic landscape of the peninsula form in a way that there are more Russians living in the Crimean hills than Ukrainians who are geographically closer to the peninsula? The answer is clear: there were more Russians in the imperial army.

The current problem of Crimea has relatively shallow historical roots. Politically the question of the borders of Ukraine was only settled in 1954. Under the control of Kiev (the capital since 1934, from 1919 to 1934 the capital was Kharkov) there were no Western territories from 1917-1939. The border to Poland was a lot farther east than nowadays, in the region of Zhitomir and Vinnitsa.

The end of 1939 and the beginning of World War II mark a milestone in the formation of contemporary Ukraine. Poland within its “distended” borders – it had absorbed Ukrainian territories after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk – ceased to exist. The lands of Western Ukraine were incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR.

Ukraine also received the cities of Lviv, Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk (Stanislav), Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi (Proskurov) and Rivne. These are sometimes described as part of “Southern Poland”.

After the war ended in 1945 the western borders of Ukraine changed once again. Northern Bukovina (Chernivtsi), cut off from Romania, and Transcarpathian Rus (Uzhhorod), cut off from “former” Slovakia, were attached to Ukraine. At the same time the fight for new territories gave the Ukrainian leadership the notion of Crimea as a logical element in the increment of the Black Sea resource.

It is hard to say how exactly the question of the affiliation of newly acquired territories was decided at the time, especially when N.S. Khrushchev was First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. At that time Crimea belonged to Russia, but the region was managed poorly.

The land had become depopulated as a result of the exile of the Crimean Tatars (May 18-20, 1944) and was in need of political strengthening. The realisation of this idea was the foundation for conflicting opinions. Some were talking about the need to strengthen the ties with Russia. Others held that the economy was in need of immediate and constant support and were counting on help from Kiev. In 1954 the idea of assistance from Ukraine prevailed – the Decree on the transfer of Crimea was signed on February 19, 1954. It was intended to solve the problems inherited by post-revolutionary Russia from the former, monarchic regime, using the resources of the Ukraine. This version of a solution to this problem was not met with any marked opposition from Moscow, although some outraged Russians expressed their displeasure on this subject – the papers are still on file in archives. The continuation of the story is based on 60 years of Crimean-Ukrainian friendship.

The „unity crisis“ within the „old“ country was insinuating itself all the time the Ukraine

<sup>4</sup>Declaration by the President of the Russian Federation, the President of the Ukraine, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in support of the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, adopted and signed on February 12, 2015. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/4803>

existed in its new, united format. During the post-soviet period of development the formidable figure of a more prosperous Russia was constantly hovering before the eyes of the inhabitants of Crimea. Exhausted by twenty three years of a badly organized economy (1991–2014), Crimeans wanted change. In Simferopol, the heart of Crimea, a signal sounded that served as a call for an uprising. A bill was drafted about the change of the republic's status. The few local representatives of Kiev tried in vain to stop the dissenters.

On March 16, 2014 the inhabitants of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea voted for a secession from the Ukraine and accession to Russia. 96,5% of those who had voted, voted for a secession from Kiev and accession to Russia. In Sevastopol, a city of federal significance, 95,6% of those turning up at poll sites voted similarly.<sup>5</sup>

84,57% of registered voters took part in the referendum – whatever people say, the opinion of the minority that did not vote could not change the general balance of power and the distribution of preferences on the peninsula. The ethnic structure of the electorate (approximately) reflected the proportions of Russians, Ukrainians, and Tatars [Illarionov 2014]. This statistic is not precise, but it essentially reflects the prevailing tendencies in Crimea.

On March 18, 2014 the Treaty of Accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia<sup>6</sup> was signed and on March 21, 2014 the corresponding statute was sealed with the high state seal<sup>7</sup>. The hasty admission of the territories into Russia was completed. According to the new Constitution, the supreme legislative institution was now called State Council of the Republic of Crimea, and the first elections to the Council took place on September 14, 2014

(70 representatives of the party “United Russia” and 5 of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia were elected)<sup>8</sup>. This was the beginning of the transformation of the old Ukrainian way of life into a Russian one.

The most important problem in Crimea today is still the connection to the main part of Russia. In this context the bridge across the Strait of Kerch connecting the peninsula with the mainland in the Krasnodar Region will become a new motor “way of life”. Construction work on the bridge ramps has only just begun, but it promises to be difficult. The discovery of rests of offshore minefields dating back to World War II was a surprise for the builders<sup>9</sup>. And this is just the beginning.

The situation with railway services along the direct line between Kerch and stations in Krasnodar or Anapa is even worse. There is a railway, but getting passenger services up and going seems impossible. Currently, there is free bus transfer from the terminal stations on the Caucasian coast, where passengers get on, to destinations in Crimea. Judging by the existing road network leading to the Crimean coast from Krasnodar, there is no reason to hope for an effective solution to the transportation problems, at least not in the immediate future.

### 3

It is hardly possible to foresee and prevent the radicalization of the positions of the parties in the current conflict. A more realistic alternative is to soften the consequences of the actions of the different participants towards each other. The mutual diplomatic and economic measures and countermeasures are what need deliberation.

The notion of solidarity and allies has changed dramatically in the context of the cur-

<sup>5</sup>Crimea has chosen Russia. *Gazeta.Ru*. 16.03.2014. URL: [http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2014/03/15\\_a\\_5951217.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2014/03/15_a_5951217.shtml)

<sup>6</sup>Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Crimea on the accession of The Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation and the formation of new territorial subjects within the Russian Federation. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20605>

<sup>7</sup>Federal constitutional law of the Russian Federation N 6–FKZ of March 21, 2014.

<sup>8</sup>Gusakova E. The electoral committees of Crimea and Sevastopol confirm election results. *Rossiyskaya gazeta*. 16.09.2014. URL: <http://www.rg.ru/2014/09/16/reg-kfo/itogi-anons.html>

<sup>9</sup>Construction site of Kerch Bridge found mine-studded. 04.04.2015. URL: <http://kerch.biz/main/16913-mesto-stroitelstva-kerchenskogo-mosta-okazalos-zaminirovannym.html>

rent crisis. From the American point of view the priority is an active, independent Ukraine actively involved in international politics. This course of action gives Washington additional resources to weaken Russia, one of the main competitors of America on the world arena,

In this context every protest by Russian leaders concerning Ukrainian politics is perceived as an attempt against the independence of the Ukrainians. It immediately causes a disturbance in Western countries. In the meantime, the crucial question at this moment is to what extent Ukraine will remain „a last resource“ in Moscow's global strategy. Every time Russia wants to act in defiance of Kiev, it hesitates, hoping, if worst comes to worst, to prevail on, to use bribery, to play on the contradictions in Ukrainian politics. An important part of the relations —economic relations — is still significant for both sides, due to which the system of asymmetrical interdependence between the two countries has not been completely destroyed.

Gradually, the Europeans have also learned to operate within the current situation, acting *in the common context of the interests of the USA and the European Union*. From the point of view of the United States this approach affords them the opportunity to act in a more focused way, using the diplomatic resources of the most respected and influential European players, Germany, France, and Italy, in the interests of common Western politics. Berlin, for instance, when dealing with the Russian issue, obviously consciously starts to act as the „common European“ agent for joint interests, although not exclusively, but at the moment predominantly with Moscow. It is trying to play a similar role in transatlantic relations as well, but pursuing different goals: protecting the economic interests of the countries of the European Union from a much too abrupt breaking of trade and economic connections with Russia: It is easy for the Americans to call for radicalism and to freeze contacts with Russia, transatlantic corporations don't stand to lose anything from that. For European countries this is a much more sensitive issue.

At the same time the current mosaic of individual intentions of different players is not

forming a unified picture. Stability in the European arena, the contours of a new status quo will depend on the answers to a number of fundamental questions. How to reconstruct the common interest of a united Europe, separating them from American-European interests? Is it possible to integrate the position of the USA and Canada from the west coast of the Atlantic Ocean; the interests of the mainland Western European countries from the Eastern Atlantic; and the interests of „the rest of Europe“ from the heart of the Ural Mountains? Which side is Moscow going to opt for under the current conditions?

For example, to which degree has Russia really been helped by its rapprochement with China, which started in 2014? It might have brought advantageous cooperation to the two countries, helped each of the concerned states in specific matters. At the same time, „surprisingly“ it turns out that the search for new preferences leads to a revision of old connections and attractions, something that is inevitably accompanied by a demolition of relationships that have proved their value. A re-orientation of existing interrelationship vectors will lead to a deconstruction of existing systems of connections on a global scale and of hard won ideas of individual states' priorities.

New preferences are reflected in the foreign policy strategies of all leading countries. At the same time the key moment is the upheaval and crisis in the relations between Kiev and Moscow. Changes have taken place in the foreign policy of Ukraine in particular, which have given the impulse for the acute conflict with the neighbor in the North and for his unexpected reaction.

As far as a broader strategy is concerned, the main thing for Moscow is to uncover the issues, on which there is no consent among the countries of the West, on which they are unable to conduct a coordinated policy. There is an obvious difference in the positions of Germany and France on the one hand, and Great Britain on the other. The former are „appeasing“ Russia, the latter is taking the pro-American line of „waiting it out“. The differences between these two centers of power seriously affect the political situation in the ranks of the united Europe.

Initially, discontent with Russia was „spread out evenly“ between all principal partners, but gradually it became more flexible and nuanced and started to vary from country to country. Germany and France became leaders among the Europeans early on. Berlin more than others depends on the supply of Siberian natural gas and this issue is impossible to ignore in its considerations.

In the meantime, Kiev constantly emphasized that in the event of a breach of obligations to Russia, it would be forced to boycott the supply to Western consumers of Russian natural gas going through Ukrainian hands. Germany realized that it was impossible to just dictate the Ukraine price reductions, but that it was possible to stimulate an arrangement in this matter indirectly. No matter how eager A. Yatsenyuk was to „twist the arms“ of Gazprom president A. Miller, he could not forget whose game piece might be thrown out, if the Ukrainian position was too obstinate.

Negotiations are based on bargaining between the Russian and Ukrainian corporations concerned, but Western consumers are invisibly present at the negotiations. The latter seldom comment publicly, but, judging by indirect evidence, they are constantly discussing and elaborating on their position. Representatives of German business do not openly participate in the Ukrainian drama, but commentators have occasionally referred to the opinions of top managers of German companies.

As early as 2014 a third actor was officially introduced into the bilateral negotiations between Russia and Ukraine – a representative of the European Union acted as an equally concerned party. Negotiations went on in Brussels for almost a year. They were resumed in March 2015. The goal is a new contract for delivery of Russian natural gas through Ukraine in the new year.

This is the outline of economic events. Now let's remember how A. Merkel discussed the political relations between Moscow and Kiev when it turned out impossible to break through

the impasse the parties found themselves in at the height of the crisis in 2014. At the time she tried to talk with all the main players – not just with France but also with the “difficult” partners (Britain, USA, Canada). Then there came a moment when Merkel talked about her substantial disagreement with V. Putin, although taking a position that was a little different from the American one. Essentially, A. Merkel agreed with Kiev's position, but felt it necessary to put pressure on it in parts. Germany gradually adopted a more active position in its approach to the crisis.

Implementing diplomacy along the lines of the „Normandy Format“ was not convenient for Germany: In this matter it found an ally in France. A. Merkel and F. Hollande came to an agreement with V. Putin and the three of them developed a program for the resolution of the conflict. P. Poroshenko joined their agreements. In the period between the two rounds of negotiations in Minsk in February 2015 A. Merkel flew to Washington for the approval of the project of the Minsk Treaties. After the Chancellor's visit American diplomacy was cautiously optimistic about her mission in the Ukrainian affair<sup>10</sup>. At the beginning of 2015 Berlin got credit for the victory over Kiev, having generalized the conditions of the compromise.

France is a different matter. Its president demonstrated that the practice of maneuvering is familiar to him – he is prepared to sit at the negotiating table. It was important for Paris to show that the diktat of the Obama administration was nothing new. All the better to appear to wear the toga of the champion of peace. This is a worthy garment for F. Hollande and he was ready to appear in it next to A. Merkel. The European Union hoped for success, since otherwise it would have to face a self-boycott in its work with Russia. Brussels was waiting for the end of the crisis – the postponement until June 2015 of the question of a prolongation of the sanctions is striking evidence of this.

<sup>10</sup>Remarks by President Obama and Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference. February 9, 2015. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/09/remarks-president-obama-and-chancellor-merkel-joint-press-conference>

France is delaying the solution of the main problem, the military-economic relations with Russia – it is putting off the issue of the delivery of the first of two high-tech ships of the type “Mistral”. In March 2015, Paris once again made it clear that the question is being discussed and, apparently, will be resolved favorably. The matter of the ship is still on the agenda<sup>11</sup>.

In the USA they reacted deliberately to the development of events in Kiev and Minsk. The leaders made announcements that are hard to consider constructive. But the position in these announcements was to support Kiev in its intentions to accommodate the European Union. The USA and Canada saw Ukraine as a nascent friendly power. Both Ukrainian leaders, who had been to Washington in 2014, spoke fluent English and appeared predictable to the American leader and public.

Never before have the people of Ukraine heard so many compliments from a leader of the USA. American leaders have forgotten the price of their own rhetoric. Maybe the mood of President B. Obama and Secretary of State J. Kerry have synched up: both leaders were shaped in their careers as local civil rights activists and in the supreme legislative institution by the influence of the ideology of the speeches they were exposed to. Psychologically both received the young Ukrainians speaking their language without translation more attentively and kindly than behooves professional politicians.

One cannot say the same thing about V. Putin. He gave 25 years to his career in government, he is the weary and tired leader of post-reform Russia<sup>12</sup>. As an elderly leader he does not understand contemporary Ukrainians, „dismisses“ them as passing figures, attacks them. Neither P. Poroshenko nor A. Yatsenyuk are perceived as „serious leaders“ in Moscow.

A. Merkel and F. Hollande also carry out the mission of their generation and look for a

compromise. Under these conditions there is food for thought for British Prime Minister David Cameron. Where to go and with whom?

#### 4

B. Obama has said so much that it is hard not to come to the conclusion that a „war of words“ has started. Under these conditions it has become a probability that Moscow is going to agree to the change in the orientation of its foreign policy that Beijing has suggested. By the way, this change implies that Russia makes some serious changes within the country – that it rejects everything that implies the acceptance of the universality of Western values and ideals, of the European norms of sovereignty and freedom. “The way east” demands a transition to anti-Western positions not only and not so much in foreign politics. The necessity of an abrupt turn like this has caused this long hesitation in answering the “Chinese alternative”.

In this context V. Putin’s reaction to an offer concerning the energy part of the cooperation the P.R. China made some time ago has been surprising. It manifested in a positive change in Moscow’s position to plans to supply natural gas to China. By all accounts these agreements are the practical embodiment of Russia’s re-orientation. Representatives of Moscow and Beijing formalized their common vision of their long-term plans of cooperation in May 2014 – the supplying of 38 billion cubic metres of natural gas a year for a period of 30 years. It was decided that phase one of the pipeline construction projects will start with the beginning of the summer season in order to finish construction in 2018<sup>13</sup>.

The path of expanding Russia’s participation in operations in Asia has been continued. On August 23–29, 2014 Moscow sent seven thousand soldiers to take part in training exercises of “Peace mission 2014”. Representatives of five member-states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – Russia, China,

<sup>11</sup>Nikolaeva A. Tired of waiting. Interfax. 27.03.2015. URL: <http://www.interfax-russia.ru/view.asp?id=595680&p=6>

<sup>12</sup>His current perception can be compared to the situation 15 years ago [Bogaturov 2012]

<sup>13</sup>Serov M., Khodyakova E. Russia is awaiting advance pay. Ведомости. 22.05.2014. № 3594. URL: <http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/05/22/rossiya-zhdet-avansa>



Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – took part in the maneuvers. Two weeks later, on September 11, 2014, a session of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation took place – this time in Tajikistan. In Dushanbe, V. Putin had another meeting with Xi Jinping, with whom he discussed shared problems. Afterwards V. Putin met with the leaders of Uzbekistan and Mongolia for separate talks. Russia's active role in the SCO was intended to demonstrate that the West will not succeed in isolating the country. Moscow was eager to emphasize that it is in high demand in the international arena.

Under these conditions the Far East has taken the central spot in Moscow's non-European plans. When and what burden on Eastern Siberia will such a policy lead to? What can be sold to and what can be bought from the small, middle-size and large Pacific states? In Moscow, the two Koreas, Japan, the ASEAN states and, finally, China and Taiwan are considered the main prospective partners.

When designing Moscow's policy, the question arises who too tear away from the „American empire in Asia“ and how to do it. Despite recurrent signals of mutual sympathy, Tokyo remains the least likely candidate for this role. US political thought has embraced the peculiarity of Japan – no matter what it is like, it has been integrated into the American economic system for a long time to come. We would like to point out that Russian thought has resigned itself to the island country's „pro-American“ status, too.

The two Korean states and a large number of small ASEAN countries are located in the Pacific region. To unite at least a part of them in an informal “empire” under its leadership is the main point of Washington's strategy in the region. The USA tries to talk to all of them except Northern Korea into cooperating. The potential of the United States' attraction among these countries is great, but there is the issue of keeping in check the competitiveness of Asian industry which may become a danger-

ous competitor to American business. The USA and Japan have succeeded in integrating it in their economic complex, but only partly.

In this context attempts to cobble together a regional economic bloc known as Trans-Pacific Partnership have received a boost. In his speech during the summit of the leaders of APEC countries in Beijing on November 10–11, 2014 president B. Obama once again emphasized its priority for American politics<sup>14</sup>. In this America-centered union there is no place for either China or Russia. It is not surprising that president V. Putin, who also participated in the Beijing summit, took a clear stand against the American initiative<sup>15</sup>.

For him the attempt at formalizing the concept of prioritizing the eastern vector meant the necessity of attaching universal significance to the Chinese market. The transition to an understanding of foreign policy in terms of strengthening the unity of world trade, like V. Putin did at the APEC summit, makes it possible to take another step towards Asia. Such an approach also means that even the limited success of the P.R. of China in building an alternative to the American economic community in the region will mean a victory for Russia as the one who helped achieve this success. At the same time there is a desire to adopt the Chinese experience in the sphere of development. The international answer to contemporary economic challenges is the strengthening of the Far East and the P.R. of China by means of development of Russian natural gas reserves. This prospect is visible: Beating the West by developing trade in Asia. Cooperation with China seems to be the key to long term prospective strengthening of the positions in Asia.

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All countries resources of stabilization are slowly running low and Russia is in an especially vulnerable position. If there is no upturn “tomorrow” (within a year and a half – two years) it will become worse: years of depression

<sup>14</sup>Remarks by President Obama at APEC CEO Summit. November 10, 2014. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/10/remarks-president-obama-apec-ceo-summit>

<sup>15</sup>Speech by President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin at session of the leaders at the APEC economic forum. 11.11.2014. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46997>

with growth rates tending to zero. The Russian government points out growth rates, but quality of life indicators are not very convincing of a favorable outcome. Savings have decreased, the national banking system is under serious pressure. Besides the economy, the government is talking about ethnic peace, but what it means is social peace. The main goal of inter-ethnic peace is to avoid violence by providing the conditions for development.

Crises do not automatically lead to war, but for several reasons they may give an impetus to a movement towards conflict. A crisis a) exhausts safety buffers; b) demands a redistribution of resources and tests the readiness of the political system to effectively realize such a redistribution; c) intensifies the problem of judging the price of negotiation; d) stimulates fears and the desire to act according to the formula "every man for himself". In any case the outcome of the current crisis will be a normalization of relations between the participat-

ing countries which will change under its influence. The more practical question is the issue of short and middle term prospects: when will it be possible to interact free from non-economic influences.

The Ukrainian crisis has come as a powerful shock to Russian politics. Russia had been realizing its policy of mutual adaptation to its former opponents, "allies and fraternal countries" within the paradigm of a "United Europe", its logic and framework, since the beginning of the 1990s. Now this paradigm has failed. What is the price of Moscow's reaction to these changes? The positions of the key international players are important: the USA, frozen between the former allies Ukraine and Russia, with the emphasis on supporting the former. Germany and France, which have proved themselves to be Moscow's most active partners in a difficult situation, and China, an unknown player in world politics. Time is running out, what will happen?

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