

Russia's Sovereignty and Emergence of Pragmatic Polycentrism

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Abstract

The article researches Russia's concept of comprehensive sovereignty that is a cornerstone of the official state paradigm. Sovereignty is analyzed in its internal as well as external dimension, both synchronically and diachronically. The concept is interconnected with national security expanding into different realms. Sovereignty-based securitization tendencies are examined through methods of discursive analysis based upon constructivist assumptions. The present study puts emphasis on conceptual constructions and discursive practices significantly affecting individual perceptions, interpretation and *Weltanschauung* of political leadership as a whole, thereby shaping behavior, strategies and policies of individual actors concerned. The analysis reveals an affinity between concepts and discursive practices of the actors included in the research – Russia, the United States, China, and the European Union. It manifests itself in the concepts of *comprehensive sovereignty*, *America First*, *dual circulation*, and *strategic autonomy* respectively. These strategies are examined in relation to the transformation of the global order from US-led hegemonism towards polycentrism. The author draws attention to the interactions within the "quadrilateral" consisting of Russia, China, the EU and the US in order to demonstrate the emergence and dynamics of *autonomization* or *regionalization*, which is to be regarded as a dialectical moment in the globalization process towards *glocalization* and *pragmatic polycentrism*. The author concludes that the EU's strategic autonomy is a positive feature, but requires the abandonment of Euro-Atlanticism, which thwarts restructuring the Eurasian macroregion in general, and settling Russia-Europe relations in particular.

Key words

Russia, United States, China, European Union, sovereignty, national security, polycentrism, Euro-Atlanticism, strategic autonomy, hegemonism

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“Without sovereignty, Russia cannot be a state. Some countries can do this, but not Russia.” These words were spoken by President Vladimir Putin during his address to the Federal Assembly in 2019.² Sovereignty is a crucial concept of Russia’s hegemonic paradigm. It is of a comprehensive nature, not limited to the realm of security or international policy. This concept is an analogous phenomenon to EU’s *strategic autonomy*, China’s *dual circulation* or Donald Trump’s *America First* policy. All these strategies are symptoms of the transformation of the global order towards a polycentric model, thus embodying complex dialectics of globalization and deglobalization, integration and regionalization. *Global restructuring* is of utmost relevance and significance in terms of contemporary socio-economic as well as political processes, also affecting the very concept of governance.

The present article examines Russia’s concept of sovereignty from both internal and external perspectives. A detailed discursive analysis is made focusing on basic normative documents (*Military Doctrine*, *National Security Strategy*), bilateral diplomatic agreements and declarations (*Joint Statement on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China*; *Joint Statement on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development*), as well as articles and statements of the highest-ranking representatives of the relevant sides (Vladimir Putin, Sergey Lavrov, Dmitry Medvedev, Donald Trump, Mike Pompeo, Joe Biden and Josep Borrell). The chosen method is based upon a constructivist assumption of the importance of ideas and ideology in social life including politics (Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, Alexander Wendt). The discursivity-oriented research can be effectively combined with related analyses of the interstate interactions, international relations and practical behavior of individual actors concerned. Both diachronic and synchronic methods are employed in order to shed light on the ongoing processes under investigation. In the article, a multidisciplinary attitude is adopted, making use of findings from political science and philosophy (Glenn Diesen, Alexander Lukin, Carl Schmitt, Dmitry Trenin), international relations

² Presidential Address to Federal Assembly. Kremlin, 2019, February 20. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863> (accessed 20.02.2022)

(Richard Sakwa, Alexander Sergunin, Dmitry Suslov, Ivan Timofeev), history (Richard Pipes, Andrei Tsygankov), and last but not least social anthropology (Chris Hann).

The analysis begins with the internal model of Russia's comprehensive sovereignty and its constitutive elements in different fields, proceeding to the external model. The inquiry is therefore put into the context of relations with the United States, China, and the European Union on the one hand, and of the increasingly strong move towards polycentrism on the other. The article thus presents an in-depth insight into the *status quo* of Russia's state paradigm, based upon the concept of sovereignty, contributing to a better understanding of the metamorphoses of global politics and governance.

Security dimension of sovereignty

The current state of international relations and development of the global order is characterized by growing tensions, conflicts and rivalry following from competition between the US, as the declining hegemon of the unipolar system that emerged after the end of the Cold War, and the non-Western powers, first and foremost China and Russia. The objective decline in Western states' potential and the concurrent shift of the political and economic center to the East arouse defiance in the West. From the Russian perspective, the existing system of international relations and security is unfair, discriminating against the rival emerging powers.³ Irrespective of the frictions in Russia's near neighborhood (Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasus or Central Asia) and a long-term confrontational policy from the West including large-scale sanctions, the Russian leadership does not expect a full-fledged war against the country.⁴

The perception of threats plays a serious role in the leadership's decision-making. These threats are formulated in the *Military Doctrine* as a substantial part of the state's strategic planning. The current version was adopted in 2014. The most serious external threat is seen in NATO, its expansion and vest-

³ Kontseptsiiia vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (The Concept of Russian Foreign Policy). Kremlin. 2016, November 30. <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁴ Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Russia's Military Doctrine). Kremlin. 2014, December 19. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

ing the organization with global functions regardless of the mandate of the UN.⁵ The tension between Russia and NATO is a permanent feature of international politics, which especially endangers European countries. While the Russian side is not against further enlargement of the EU in principle, perceiving the European integration project as legitimate and analogous to Eurasian integration in the post-Soviet space and even a model for the EAEU in a sense, it has rejected US-led NATO policies and activities for a long period (Sergunin, 2016, p. 154, 162). The origins of the current controversies lie in the Gorbachev era (Gvozdev & Marsh, 2014, p. 78). Boris Yeltsin allowed for expansion only if Russia itself was included (Gvozdev & Marsh, 2014, p. 211), thus anticipating future projects of a single security area comprising North America, Europe and Russia (Dmitry Medvedev) or common military systems (Vladimir Putin). From a comparative perspective, Russia respects the development of the EU while disapproving of NATO. It follows that the main obstacle for security and stability between Russia and Europe lies in Washington's hegemonic interests discursively justified by a concept of the Euro-Atlantic community.

The second major threat is seen in the destabilization of individual countries and whole regions.⁶ Undoubtedly, the Russian strategists have the practice of color revolutions in mind. This point can also be interpreted as a criticism of the export of liberal democracy which is connected with Western exceptionalism and the false self-perception of this model as a universal one that is to be established globally disregarding specific local conditions. Whereas the first defined threat regards the military practice, the second one applies to the political practice carried out by the Western countries. Another risk is seen in the deployment of military contingents on the territories of the adjacent or allied countries as well as in the expansion of missile systems, undermining agreements on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, development of the global strike concept or militarization of outer space.⁷

The current *Military Doctrine* anticipates that nuclear weaponry will safeguard the role of deterrence and prevention of an outbreak of full-fledged as well

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Russia's Military Doctrine). Kremlin. 2014, December 19. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁷ Ibid.

as limited military conflicts. Therefore, the Russian Federation has been interested in the maintenance of the *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty* (New START) as the cornerstone of the stability of the international regime of nuclear arms. The Treaty was signed in Prague in 2010 as a sequel of quite a long history of negotiations between Moscow and Washington in the field of non-proliferation, control and reduction of strategic weapons, which started in the 1960s with the multilateral *Partial Test Ban Treaty* (PTBT), *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty* (NPT) and the bilateral *Interim Agreement on Offensive Arms* (SALT I) from 1972. There have been several bilateral agreements since then. The collapse of the USSR did not make Russia-US treaties irrelevant, as the Russian Federation took over a substantial part of the Soviet military arsenal. Even though overall Russia's role diminished in the newly emerged unipolar world dominated by the US as a global hegemon in the 1990s, the country remained a military great power. As such, Russia has played a crucial role in the balance and stability of international security, endeavoring to preserve the status quo.

However, the security regime was put in danger during Donald Trump's presidency. From the beginning, Trump took a stand against the bilateral agreements in the field, similarly as in the case of the multilateral *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*, regarding the Iranian nuclear program. In 2019, the US withdrew from the *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (INF Treaty) signed by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan in 1987. This step provoked concerns about a situation when no arms control limits would be in force. Washington accused Russia of breaching the treaty, which Moscow denied.⁸ The real reason behind the US attack on the INF Treaty was, nevertheless, connected with growing tensions with China, with the allegations against Russia's "transgressions" being rather a pretext than anything else. As China was not included in the treaty, it was free to develop and deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles.⁹

Trump attempted to establish new security regimes instead of the existing ones, which were considered disadvantageous for the US as putting other rele-

⁸ Marcus, J. INF Nuclear Treaty: US Pulls out of Cold War-era Pact with Russia. BBC, 2019, August 02. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49198565> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁹ Sanger, D. E., & Broad, W. J. U.S. to Tell Russia It Is Leaving Landmark I.N.F. Treaty. New York Times. 2019, October 19. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/19/us/politics/russia-nuclear-arms-treaty-trump-administration.html> (accessed 20.02.2022)

vant actors, first and foremost China, aside. It was not only a question of the INF Treaty but also of the New START. The latter was to expire in February 2021. Under the circumstances when the US withdrew from the INF Treaty and added new conditions to agree with the prolongation, including a redefinition of the agreement and engaging China, it seemed very unlikely that the New START would be extended. All the more so that Washington refused Moscow's suggestions, for instance, temporary extension without any preconditions.¹⁰ When the current US President Joe Biden assumed the presidency, it was clear that there would be no quick substantial turn in the relationship with Russia. Standing as a candidate, Biden wrote about the need for countering "Putin's kleptocratic authoritarian system".¹¹ In his first presidential speech dedicated to foreign affairs, Biden accused Russia of aggression including interference in the US election, conducting cyber-attacks or poisoning its citizens¹². In spite of the confrontational policy, the new administration avoided the imminent threat of the arms race, supporting the prolongation of the New START, thus manifesting the US readiness to find common ground at least as far as most risk issues are concerned. The treaty would probably not have been extended until 2026 without Biden becoming President.

The Russian leadership has put a strong emphasis on the use of nuclear arms with regard to the deterrence policy. President Putin signed a strategic document dedicated to this area which was made public for the first time ever in 2020. In the new *Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence*, the nuclear arsenal is considered a crucial element for Russia's sovereignty.¹³ The strategy postulates a strictly defensive character of the latter. At the same time it allows the active use of nuclear arms but solely in the case of nuclear attack against the country or its allies, as well as in case

¹⁰ TASS. 2020, October 16. URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/9738037> (accessed 20.02.2022)

¹¹ Biden, J. R. Why America Must Lead Again. Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump. Foreign Affairs, 2020, March/April. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again> (accessed 20.02.2022)

¹² Biden, J. R. Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World. White House, 2021, February 04. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/> (accessed 20.02.2022); Crane, M. Biden Agrees Putin Is a Killer, Says He'll Pay for Meddling. Bloomberg, 2021, March 17. URL <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-17/biden-agrees-putin-is-killer-says-he-ll-pay-price-for-meddling> (accessed 20.02.2022)

¹³ Osnovy gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v oblasti iadernogo sderzhivaniia (Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence). Kremlin. 2020, June 02. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/lluTKhAiabLzOBjfbSVu4q3bcl7AXd7.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

of any aggression endangering the existence of the Russian state.¹⁴ Similarly, article 22 of the *Military Doctrine* enables employing the Armed Forces in the case of aggression against Russia or allies, in the case of the decision of the UN Security Council or other collective security bodies and, last but not least, in the case of need for protection of Russian citizens abroad.¹⁵ Article 31 expands the legitimacy of the external military intervention if this is carried out in line with principles and norms of international law, international agreements and Russian legislation. These provisions might be used to active military actions abroad, making the defensive posture more offensive.

Russia's action readiness was demonstrated especially in Syria and Crimea in the last years. Russia has been endeavoring to strengthen its security, protect the sovereignty and multiply military potential through cooperation with other partners, first and foremost within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The allies *sensu stricto* are countries participating in the CSTO which is a military alliance, unlike two other multilateral institutions. The asset of the SCO lies in the fact that transcends the limited post-Soviet area including a wide array of Eurasian countries and provides the states with an opportunity to interconnect and converge national development strategies as well as grand initiatives as the Belt and Road Initiative or the Eurasian Economic Union (Kaczmarek, 2017, p. 1036). The significance of the SCO consists in the fact that the member states generate more than 20% of the global GDP, accounting for virtually 42% of the world's population. It is the most important non-Western regional organization which can contribute considerably to reshaping the global order according to the reformist agenda of the participants (Zemánek, 2020, p. 202).

Naturally, the leading role has been played by the engines of Eurasian integration – Russia and China. Moscow found common ground with Beijing as far as the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism are concerned (China calls these threats “The Three Evils”). Security and military cooperation be-

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Russia's Military Doctrine). Kremlin. 2014, December 19. <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

tween Russia and China have been deepening, especially after 2014. Both major powers reject the idea of establishment of the alliance, thus clearly demonstrating an innovative attitude towards interstate relations and cooperation, based on openness, overlapping interests and heterogeneous integration model, the basis of which lies in different speed and levels of integration in individual areas, sometimes even going beyond the traditional alliance (Lukin, 2018b, p. 128). Both countries are aware of the Western hegemonic ambitions, export of liberal democracy and destabilizing actions in relation to the countries with different values and political systems. The SCO, therefore, serves to the deterrence of the Western quasi-universalism and gradual transformation of the international order to be based on polycentrism, equality, inclusiveness and the principles of peaceful coexistence, the prerequisite of which is the very existence of different models and a plurality of development as well as modernization patterns. Russia's sovereignty can be protected in a more effective way through the above-mentioned institutions. Paradoxically, engagement in supranational organizations and integration, thus openness and not introversion, may become the way towards stronger sovereignty and national security for Russia.

Comprehensive sovereignty: an internal perspective

The principle of sovereignty is enshrined in strategic documents in a wide array of fields. It applies not only to national security, external relations or economy but also to the energy sector, information security or cultural policy. Its significance, therefore, cannot be overestimated, sovereignty being a quintessence of the current Russian state and hegemonic paradigm. Russia's concept of sovereignty can be interpreted as based on the threefold principle of strategic *autonomy/independence*, strategic *stability* and strategic *partnership*.¹⁶ These categories define both internal and external dimensions of the existence of the state. The *National Security Strategy* (hereinafter referred to as NSS) follows the tradition of patrimonialism and etatism (see: Pipes, 1974, p. 24) when defining the need for strengthening the power of the state to accomplish social security.

¹⁶ The 2021 *National Security Strategy* leaves the term "strategic partnership" of the 2015 NSS out, replacing it with "win-win international cooperation".

Such an attitude preserves the crucial role of the power vertical and its responsibility for addressing people's interests. The strong role of the vertical is also to secure protection against external interference which is frequently thematized in different contexts by the NSS. An emphasis is put on the threat posed by foreign intelligence services and other foreign organizations, terrorist, extremist and radical forces undermining the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political and social stability or traditional religious and moral Russian values. Besides, the strong state vertical is to protect citizens against external propaganda as well as the one carried out by "inner enemies".¹⁷ Such a strategy clearly demonstrates that the elites consider the strong state, its apparatus and institutions as a key to maintaining the country's sovereignty.

Economic sovereignty is an inseparable part of the political one. The important point is a crucial role ascribed to the state – analogous to its role in social development. A strong role of the state in the economic processes is a constant of Russian history (Tsygankov, 2014, p. 7). Neither the free market nor the Weberian protestant ethic has been characteristic of Russian society. On the contrary, economy was perceived as a secondary social institution (always subjugated either to religious principles or political and social goals) in the pre-revolutionary epoch. Even the history of the Russian socialist and communist movement is suffused with the adoration of the state and its role, despite the Marxist theory of the economic base and social superstructure. The Bolsheviks did not win because of the economic conditions – they win because of their political will, credo and quasi-religious zeal.¹⁸ The Soviet era further deepened the embedded Russian mistrust of market mechanisms and entrepreneurship. Russia's civilizational trajectory confirms the observations presented by social anthropologist Chris Hann, according to whom the Eurasian societies have been characteristic of "inclusive embeddedness", the economy being subordinated to broader social goals and needs (Hann, 2016, p. 4). Similarly, the Soviet system was nothing absolutely extraneous, but at least partially followed older traditions and developmental tendencies based on the strong role played by the Russian state.

¹⁷ Strategiya natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii (National Security Strategy). Kremlin. 2015, December 31. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201512310038.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

¹⁸ Not by coincidence, the first Soviet People's Commissar for Education Anatolii Lunacharskii propounded a specific theory of *bogostroitel'stvo*, "God-Building", emphasizing that socialism is the most religious of all religions. See: Lunacharskii (1908).

The principles of central planning, the state's control over the economic activities, priority of political goals as well as the dominant position of the state in the modernization and reforms were presented in different forms both in the pre-revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union. One can conclude that the Soviet experiment radicalized older patterns, reinterpreting them in a modernist way. However, a different perspective also existed. Reformists Sergei Witte and Pyotr Stolypin started to pave the way for Russia with the middle class, more inclusive and participatory model with wider space for individual activities and market mechanisms. In post-Soviet Russia, Dmitry Medvedev followed this line. Amidst the economic recession in 2009, he formulated a modernization program in which the Russian President harshly criticized economic backwardness, commodity dependence, low productivity and innovations or fragility of democratic institutions. Medvedev rejected paternalism and historic forms of Russian modernization connected with Peter I and the Bolsheviks. The new program was to develop Russian democracy and establish a new, post-industrial economy.¹⁹ The liberal ethos of the three mentioned reformists did not deny local peculiarities or conservative moral values arising from the Orthodoxy but represented a more open, more liberal model of Russia's modernization as well as external behavior.

Both at the beginning of the 20th century and in the 2010s, this reformist shift was interrupted due to the external factors – the Great War, which was joined by the Russian Empire with an utter reluctance, and the color revolution in Ukraine in 2014, the subsequent anti-Russian campaign launched by the Western countries and deteriorating relations. Vladimir Putin has accentuated different elements, but the policies throughout his terms have not been incompatible with the reformist modernization agenda essentially. Putin's program has also been aimed at integration in the global economy, acceleration of the economic growth, progressive development of the national economy, support for the business environment, and the political system development. The agenda, nevertheless, gradually became more securitized and the key goal was not “mild” Westernization and building the Greater Europe anymore but protec-

¹⁹Medvedev, D. *Go Russia!* Kremlin. 2009, September 10. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5413> (accessed 20.02.2022)

tion of sovereignty and Russian peculiarity, deepening of autonomy in all necessary fields and Eurasian integration where possible. Modernization, regional and interregional integration or sovereign opening up was not abandoned but modified under adverse external conditions and growing frictions worldwide (Sakwa, 2021, p. 5-6).

Safeguarding of sovereignty was accompanied by stronger emphasis on self-sufficiency and development of own systems independent of the global ones (which creates a comfortable position in the cases of crises or conflicts) in the post-2014 period. It applies to the payment system, interbank financial telecommunication system, navigation satellite system, 5G systems or the Internet. Protection of the Russian Internet against external threats should be accomplished on the basis of the act passed in 2019 in response to the US *National Cyber Strategy* which declared the ambition to spread US particular interests worldwide.²⁰ Russia's path towards information and digital sovereignty is not isolated. It has to be perceived in an international context when many actors seek the same self-protection. In general, the assertion of information sovereignty is one of the most important tasks states have in the digital era (Romashkina, 2019). Moscow introduced numerous acts in this direction, including a data localization law or a law regarding import substitution of foreign IT products. Foreign encryption protocols of the Russian Internet should be supplemented by the domestic ones in the near future and the 5G networks are to be based on Russian or Chinese technologies.²¹ One of Russia's leading media holding Gazprom-Media has started to prepare a Russian version of TikTok while a national alternative of Wikipedia is also under preparation.²² Similarly, the US, the EU and China seek digital sovereignty, trying to minimize mutual interdependence and vulnerability. Washington banned TikTok and WeChat, preventing Huawei and ZTE from

²⁰ According to President Putin, the Internet and media should be regulated not only by the positive legal norms but also by moral, natural law. Putin Calls for Internet Bound by Moral Rules, Criticizes Opposition Rallies. Reuters. 2021, March 04. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-internet-idUSKCN2AW2D4> (accessed 20.02.2022); Priniat zakon o «suverennom internete» (Adopting Sovereign Internet Law). Gosudarstvennaia Duma. 2019, April 16. URL: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/44551/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

²¹ Chen, Q. China, Russia to Form Closer Partnership on 5G in Defiance of US. Global Times. 2020, August 24. URL: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1198654.shtml> (accessed 20.02.2022)

²² Russia to Launch Own TikTok Developed With Putin's Alleged Daughter. AFP. 2020, December 23. URL: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/23/russia-to-launch-own-tiktok-developed-with-putins-alleged-daughter-a72467> (accessed 20.02.2022); Rossiiskii analog "Vikipedii" oboidetsia biudzhetu RF pochti v 2 mldr rublei (Russian analogous Wikipedia will cost 2 bln rubles). Interfax. 2019, September 26. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/677964> (accessed 20.02.2022)

doing business in the country. Trump's administration introduced the *Clean Network* program aimed at the protection of data, privacy, security and rights against "aggressive intrusions by malign actors".²³ The EU promotes the policy of strategic autonomy within which cooperation with the pioneering Chinese companies is jeopardized.²⁴ However, Russia lags behind the other major powers in many respects, and the overall competitiveness, innovative potential and technological development are not comparable to the US or China's. Therefore Russia is likely to deepen cooperation with Chinese partners to offset this considerable disadvantage.²⁵

The *National Security Strategy* is a cornerstone of Russia's official state paradigm. Unlike other strategic documents (for instance, *Military Doctrine*, *Foreign Policy Concept*, *Economic Security Strategy*, *Energetic Security Doctrine*, *Information Security Doctrine* or *Foundations of State Cultural Policy*), it deals with all these areas, synthesizing them into a comprehensive whole. Dmitry Trenin considers the 2021 NSS "the most important Kremlin strategy statement" and "a manifesto" for the present era characteristic of a deep confrontation with the Western world (Trenin, 2021). Indeed, the two last versions of the NSS were formulated under different circumstances. The preceding one was issued in response to the Ukrainian crisis, sudden deterioration of relations with the West, the pivot to the East and strong uncertainty about the impacts of the pressure and sanctions on the Russian economy and society as such. The last years showed that the country was able to withstand, transforming economic processes, diversifying external ties and deepening integration within the Greater Eurasia (Lukin & Novikov, 2021, p. 52-53). The current NSS reflects the further deterioration of relations with Europe and the US, missing them out completely. Similarly, prospects of cooperation with NATO are omitted, thus signaling that Moscow does not expect any substantial progress in the relations with the West in the upcoming years.

²³ The Clean Network. U.S. Department of State. 2020. URL: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-clean-network/index.html> (accessed 20.02.2022)

²⁴ Csernaton, R. The EU's Rise as a Defense Technological Power: From Strategic Autonomy to Technological Sovereignty. Carnegie Europe, 2021, August 12. URL: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/08/12/eu-s-rise-as-defense-technological-power-from-strategic-autonomy-to-technological-sovereignty-pub-85134> (accessed 20.02.2022)

²⁵ Epifanova, A. Digital Sovereignty on Paper: Russia's Ambitious Laws Conflict with Its Tech Dependence. Wilson Center. 2020, October 23. URL: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/digital-sovereignty-paper-russias-ambitious-laws-conflict-its-tech-dependence> (accessed 20.02.2022)

In this regard, the 2021 Strategy is much more skeptical and explicit as far as the confrontational actions of the US, its allies as well as transnational corporations are concerned. The illiberal wording becomes obvious when the cultural Westernization is called a fatal threat for Russia and the absolutization of freedom of individuals, egoism and immorality is criticized as proof of the West's decline while emphasizing the significance of the traditional values and norms as well as religious foundations of societies.²⁶ Such rhetoric corresponds with Putin's assessment of today's Western liberalism. In an interview given to the *Financial Times* in 2019, he refused the hegemonic ambitions of the liberal elites, castigating them for their contempt for the rights of the majority, assaults on the traditional values and silencing opponents. Russian President expressed his belief that biblical values are more universal than liberal ones.²⁷ The 2021 NSS thus embodies the conservative worldview of the Russian leadership, articulating and shaping the hegemonic discourse, which will be reflected in the adjustments of the partial doctrines in the following months and years.

The conservative character of the ruling paradigm (Diesen, 2021, p. 205) is confirmed by the definition of the traditional Russian values, put forward by the 2015 NSS, with the priority of the spiritual over the material at the top and followed by the protection of human life, rights and freedoms, family, creative labor, service to the motherland, the norms of morality, humanism, charity, fairness, mutual assistance, collectivism, unity of Russia's nations and the continuity of the Russian history. This conservative discourse is complemented by a strict refusal of external interference undermining cultural sovereignty. The Russian state stipulates the right to protect citizens against external expansion in terms of ideology and values, as well as to control the information sphere.²⁸ The 2021 Strategy rearranges the enumeration of the Russian values only minimally.²⁹

The establishment and reinforcement of sovereignty in different spheres of the life of the state and society brings multiple risks, especially in terms of

²⁶ Strategiiia natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Kremlin (National Security Strategy 2021). 2021, July 02. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0plD1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

²⁷ U.S. – Russia Presidential Joint Statement on Strategic Stability. Kremlin 2021, June 16. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5658> (accessed 20.02.2022)

²⁸ Strategiiia natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii (National Security Strategy). Kremlin. 2015, December 31. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201512310038.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

²⁹ Strategiiia natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Kremlin (National Security Strategy 2021). 2021, July 02. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0plD1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

individual rights and freedoms. The dominant conservative paradigm under Vladimir Putin is nevertheless moderate. Potential radicalization is dependent mainly on the objective external pressure and subjective sense of danger. This combination is risky if taking the Russian tradition of patrimonialism, strong state, and collectivism into consideration. It could result in a substantial closure of the country, the building of a fortress and isolationism. In that case, Russia might become a real international threat – which is not absolutely at this moment. On the contrary, it is the anti-Russian narrative together with actual political steps aimed against Russia which forces the country to the adoption of defensive, partially hostile stance.

Comprehensive sovereignty: an external perspective

Russia's concept of sovereignty includes the principles of autonomy and independence, strategic stability and partnership. Whereas the autonomy and independence reflect predominantly the internal dimension, the stability and partnership concern the external one – the external relations as well as a vision of and practical steps towards reform of the global system in line with the general normative outlook on how the system should be designated and structured in the 21st century. In this chapter, we will turn to the external dimension, going through the strategic framework defined by the *National Security Strategies* and subsequently focusing on the relations with the US and China.

It is worth noticing that both the 2015 and 2021 NSS do not position the relations with the West (the US and Europe) on the top of priorities. It has a symbolic significance connected with the deep disillusionment with the Western policies in the last decades, turn to the East and renunciation of Westernization. It shows that the West is not in the spotlight anymore, thus underlining the objective reality of multipolarization and the rise of the East. Taking this development into account, the secondary position of the US and Europe within the NSS exceeds the genuinely symbolic meaning and expresses the rational and pragmatic choice made in response to the transformation of the global order, economy and politics. Not surprisingly, therefore, the 2015 NSS emphasized the multilateral cooperation within BRICS, SCO, APEC and G20, highlighting the relationship with China and India. Besides, stress was laid on the near neigh-

borhood, the CIS and integration processes in Eurasia, first and foremost, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). As far as Europe is concerned, the NSS mentioned the support for win-win cooperation with the European states and the EU, harmonization of integration processes in Europe and on the post-Soviet territory (EAEU) as well as the establishment of joint collective security architecture in the Euro-Atlantic region.³⁰ These were long-term goals pursued by the Russian establishment. Their inclusion in the 2015 NSS can be perceived as proof of continuity and transparency of Russia's foreign policy if we become aware of the context of the sharp deterioration in the relations with the West. Irrespective of obvious Washington's involvement in the coup d'état in Ukraine, Moscow reaffirmed its readiness to develop the bilateral partnership. Moreover, it admitted the development of relations with NATO on the condition that the latter respects international law and Russia's interests.³¹

The wording of the 2021 NSS is different. It contains the keystones of the long-term Russian strategy such as maintenance of the central coordination role of the UN and the UN Security Council, deepening cooperation within CIS, CSTO, SCO, BRICS, EAEU or ASEAN. However, no explicit mentions of Europe, the US and NATO are made. It is especially the part dedicated to external affairs which distinguishes the present strategy from the former. And it is sharper in criticism. The world is characterized as a place where contradictions and conflicts have been intensifying and where the declining powers of the West assault on others, violate principles and norms of the international law as well as international treaties, breach sovereignty, undermine trust among individual actors and stability of the system, impose sanctions and attempt to revise the existing rules. Obviously, Russia endeavors to present itself as a crucial stabilizing element and protector of the *status quo*. In this regard, the NSS addresses the need for reinforcement of coherence and resilience of the international system and its legal base, strengthening of international peace and collective security, prevention of military conflicts and, last but not least, – strategic stability.³²

³⁰ Strategiiia natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii (National Security Strategy). Kremlin. 2015, December 31. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201512310038.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Strategiiia natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Kremlin (National Security Strategy 2021). 2021, July 02. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0plD1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

Russia's self-perception as a protector of the *status quo* and concurrent accusation against the declining Western actors of revisionism is not new, since it has appeared in recent articles published by the highest representatives, especially Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov. In the article *The World at a Crossroads and a System of International Relations for the Future* from 2019, Lavrov subjected the West and its liberal democratic ideology to criticism. Lambasting the West for endeavors to usurp the fruits of globalization to the detriment of the “rest”, he describes the Western countries as hypocrites, for the narrative based on freedom, democracy and human rights entails inequality, injustice, selfishness and exceptionalism (Lavrov, 2019, p. 10). More or less explicitly, Minister follows the concepts of multiple modernities, multipolarity and multilateralism which fit the reality of the transforming global order. From the Russian perspective, the West invented the concept of a *rules-based order* which is revisionist in its essence. Lavrov characterizes it as a calculated, selective combination of rules, unilaterally employed with the aim to circumvent multilateral, collective decision-making and international legal instruments and processes based on the UN Charter as a core of the post-war order.³³

The rules-based order introduces a division between liberal democracies and “authoritarian powers”, “autocracies”, between allies and systemic rivals, friends and enemies. Inevitably, it leads to confrontation, conflicts and instability of the international system. The Western concept is opposite to pragmatism, openness and pluralism, being another sequel of Western universalism. Moreover, it is utterly moralistic, introducing the ethical categories of good and evil into international politics, making it very ideologized. The US President is trying to establish an “alliance of democracies” to confront “autocracies”. At his first news conference after the election, Biden spoke about a “battle” between these two artificially invented camps.³⁴ Later on, the US highest representative announced the plan to organize a summit of the “democratic states” to counter global authoritarianism.³⁵ The Biden administration develops continuously the

³³ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁴ Sanger, D. E. Biden Defines His Underlying Challenge with China: ‘Prove Democracy Works’. New York Times. 2021, March 26. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/26/us/politics/biden-china-democracy.html> (accessed 20.02.2022)

³⁵ President Biden to Convene Leaders’ Summit for Democracy. The White House. 2021, August 11. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/08/11/president-biden-to-convene-leaders-summit-for-democracy/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

confrontational narrative created during Donald Trump's presidency, albeit in a more sophisticated, ostensibly more diplomatic and moderate way. Biden's "alliance of democracies" is a reformulation of Trump's and Pompeo's antinomy between the "free world" and "new tyranny", i.e. China and its kind.³⁶ Continuity in external policy between these two seemingly contradictory Presidents is indisputable, even though Biden pursues a more multilateral, more collective, more inclusive attitude. This attitude is, nevertheless, conditioned by adherence to the "democratic" camp, to the universalist and hegemonic Western paradigm. The others are excluded. That is why the UN-based order ceases being convenient for the West since the objective power decline results in an inability to control the system. And that is why the Western actors are seeking to replace the *UN-based* order with the *rules-based* one.

The West's attempts to marginalize the UN and weaken collective decision-making irrespective of socioeconomic, political, ideological or cultural differences are obvious, so the Russian accusations of revisionism are justifiable. On the other hand, however, the post-1991 world was dominated by the West with the US on the top, being greatly unipolar, and these dominating actors – be they states, transnational corporations or other non-state subjects – are interested in the preservation of the model and their hegemony. The reality is therefore more complex and the role of the West is ambiguous, being typical of contradictory tendencies towards the maintenance of the status quo and revisionism.³⁷

The revisionist tendencies can be seen in the US withdrawal from the *Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty* (ABM Treaty) in 2002, *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA), the UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO in 2018, *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (INF Treaty) in 2019, *Paris Agreement and Treaty on Open Skies* in 2020. The US position towards the *Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty* (CTBT) is also questionable as Washington is reluctant to ratify it. Similarly, the destiny of the *Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms* (New START) was extremely uncertain for a long period. Many of these steps disrupted the foundations

³⁶ Pompeo, M. R. Communist China and the Free World's Future. U.S. Department of State 2020, July 23. URL: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/communist-china-and-the-free-worlds-future-2/index.html> (accessed 20.02.2022)

³⁷ In this article, I put aside the difference between reformism and revisionism as it is not substantial for the reasoning (compare with: Sergunin, 2016, p. 25, 27, 32-35). Revisionism is simply meant as the effort to change the *status quo*.

of the system, gradually forming after World War II amidst the systemic confrontation between and coexistence of the two camps. The US withdrawals thus undermined relative stability and transparency brought about by the bilateral agreements between the US and the USSR. The Russian Federation assumed obligations and inherited armaments from the Soviet period and as such, it continues to be one of the pillars of international security architecture with the UN Security Council as its core. In this regard, it is Washington that has attempted to reverse the long-term *status quo*. The US have ignored the UN Security Council resolutions (for instance regarding the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), launched unilateral military operations without authorization by this UN body and carried out multiple measures aimed against other countries – extra-territorial use of the US legislation, spying on their closest allies, abuse of the status of the USD as the main means of payment, introduction of protectionist barriers and, last but not least, imposition of sanctions. These practices have become an integral part of the US-led rules-based order.

The imposition of sanctions is an increasingly frequent practice used by liberal democracies against others. Given the intensifying frictions and transformation of the global order, continuation and deepening of this tendency are to be expected in the following period. It is worth noting that in spite of the strong pressure, the impacts on the Russian economy have been relatively low compared to other external factors such as the drop in oil prices, global pandemic and related economic slump. The data published by the International Monetary Fund follows that the role of sanctions accounted only for -0.2% in terms of GDP growth. At the same time, low macroeconomic influence is accompanied by high risks for individual businesses and projects (Timofeev, 2021, p. 4). In his report *Sanctions Against Russia: A Look into 2021*, Ivan Timofeev, therefore, comes to the conclusion that the best long-term answer for Russia is to lower dependency on the Western structures through concurrent development of the national payment system and a single payment system within the EAEU and the SCO, de-dollarization of the Russian economy as well as the development of international/regional mechanisms of counter-sanctions (Timofeev, 2021, p. 19). The significance of the latter is highlighted by the fact that it is China and Russia together with Iran that is the most frequent targets. Adaptation on the Western restrictive regimes thus could be made more effective through

the SCO, especially after the Islamic Republic becomes a full member of the organization.³⁸

Not only sanctions show that the discourse dividing countries into “democracies” and “autocracies” is dangerous. Instead, the division into those who advocate unipolarity or multipolarity is relevant. We can hardly avoid delimitation, as the world is full of antagonism, contradictions, divergent interests and conflicts. As long the sphere of the political exists, dividing lines are inevitable. The difference between friends and foes, allies and challengers remains. As Carl Schmitt (2015) put it, the political world is pluriverse in its essence, since the existence of genuine universality requires complete depoliticization, hence the elimination of the state as a social institution. At this stage of development, the elimination of the state or *withering away of the state* – if we use the Marxist term coined by Friedrich Engels in his *Anti-Dühring* – is not only unfeasible but also undesirable. The opponents of Western hegemonism and unipolarity need to have a strong state to break those structures that hamper the development towards a more democratic, fairer, more equal, more inclusive model. Naturally, it raises resistance from the declining powers which have resorted to the narrative of democracies versus autocracies, rules-based order versus a “law-of-the-jungle-based” order. Such a picture is false, serving merely the particular interests of the weakening hegemons.

Joe Biden gave up the isolationist America First imperative, replacing it with “Democracies First”. Of course, the US only has liberal democracies in mind. The internationalist agenda, however, remains particularist, albeit presented as universalist and objectively valid. The US President has revived ties with the allies, making some initial concessions (Nord Stream 2), but continues establishing a “global democratic phalanx”, as an American scholar called one of the pillars of the Biden doctrine (Brands, 2021). Biden makes use of the existing, frequently overwhelming structures like Group of Seven, the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), the Indo-Pacific Strategy (“*A free and open Indo-Pacific*”), América Crece, T-12 (League of Digital Democracies), D-10 (Democracies 10) and the *Clean Network*, or is developing new ones such as B3W initiative

³⁸ SCO Opposes External Meddling, Builds Shield against Outside Forces. Global Times. 2021, September 17. URL: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1234595.shtml> (accessed 20.02.2022)

(*Build Back Better World*), the Summit for Democracy, AUKUS or Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to advance hegemonic interests and contain “autocracies”. The first leader-level summit of the Quad was held in March 2021.³⁹ The Biden administration tries to give a new impetus to this grouping with the aim to incorporate it into the “global phalanx” and employ it against China. The G7 summit in Carbis Bay in June 2021 presented the B3W initiative to provide an alternative to the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) in relation to the “strategic competition” with Beijing. The ambitious infrastructure project is focused on low- and middle-income countries from the Americas to Africa, Indo-Pacific and beyond. Representatives of the largest liberal democracies agreed on an investment worth at least 40 trillion USD. Both the ideologic background and financial sources come predominantly from the US. The idea can be interpreted as an expanded and updated version of the New Silk Road Initiative announced by the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011. It also builds on the *Blue Dot Network* (BDN) launched in 2019. Washington as a leading force of the B3W plans to engage the Development Finance Corporation, the Agency for International Development (USAID), the Export-Import Bank (EXIM), the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the US Trade and Development Agency or the Transaction Advisory Fund.⁴⁰ Generally, the US-led global initiative is in line with the *Strategic Competition Act of 2021*, one of the priorities of which is to counter the “malign influence of the Communist Party of China” worldwide, thus following the anti-Chinese discourse and policies of Trump’s era with its zero-sum-game logic. What, then, is Russia’s position amid the “strategic competition” between Washington and Beijing declared by the US political class?

Russia-US-China triangle. The first summit of Biden and Putin in Geneva, following the public accusations made by the US President⁴¹, could be interpreted as a step towards stabilization of the volatile and deteriorating relations. The

³⁹ Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: “The Spirit of the Quad”. The White House. 2021, March 12. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁴⁰ President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership. The White House. 2021c, June 12. URL: <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/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁴¹ The Czech Republic expressed an interest in the mediation of the meeting in Prague, but the plan was thwarted as a result of an unprecedented anti-Russian campaign in the country based on the allegation of Russia’s “terrorist act” on Czech territory in 2014. For greater detail see Zemánek (2021a; 2021b).

goal was not a reset of the relationship, and created a more realistic context. As Dmitry Suslov (2021) aptly expressed it, the realistic aim was to lay foundations for a “managed confrontation”. Moscow welcomed this initiative irrespective of the recent US actions perceived as hostile – sanctions, the expulsion of diplomats, hesitation in prolongation of the New START, forming a front against “autocracies”, engagement in Belarus, military provocations, labeling Russia’s President as a “killer”, accusations of attacks against other countries (the Czech Republic in 2014 in particular) and so on and so forth. The reasons behind Biden’s efforts are likely to be connected with China, as the latter has become the cardinal rival for Washington, replacing Russia.⁴² Therefore, Biden is motivated to seek sustainability in their relations with Moscow, notwithstanding deeply divergent interests and values. It seems to be a sequel to Trump’s vision to revive cooperation with Russia against China which failed primarily due to historical experience, and the mental and ideological inertia of the US establishment.

In both cases, nevertheless, it is still the same zero-sum-game perspective, calculated cooperation with one country against another. Whereas Washington took side with China several times in the last century, such a symbiosis never existed with Russia – with the exception of hints in the 1990s. The US supported Japan financially against Russia in the Russo-Japanese War at the beginning of the 20th century. They refused to recognize the USSR until 1933 as the last of the major powers, even though the rule of the Soviet regime had been a *fait accompli* long before this. The first bilateral agreement was concluded no earlier than 1964. In spite of the balance of power based on nuclear deterrence, both hegemons waged a wide array of proxy wars against each other. The US also imposed sanctions on the Soviet Union, for example in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The unique possibility to incorporate the new Russia into the Euro-Atlantic community after 1991 miscarried predominantly due to the West’s arrogant belief of superiority and hegemonism (NATO expansion eastwards, support for separatism in Russia, disrespect for Russia’s specific conditions, interests and needs). Given these experiences, it is hard to expect that any kind of “Russiamerica” (akin to “Chinamerica”) will emerge in the future

⁴² Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community. Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2021, April 09. URL: <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

and oppose anyone, unless other emerging non-Western actors adopt a radical anti-Russian attitude. The Biden-Putin summit was merely aimed to find an elementary level of understanding and communication which had been lost because of the extreme politicization of the Russian question in the US under Donald Trump. Russia became one of the main factors in the domestic political struggle. It made a constructive policy towards Moscow impossible. Unlike the preceding President, Joe Biden is not accused of having ties with the Kremlin in the public discourse, which paradoxically may facilitate mutual interactions (Kortunov, 2021, p. 7-10).

Regardless of discrepancies, the Geneva summit can be interpreted in terms of starting talks about “strategic stability”.⁴³ The US side has made a constructive step when agreeing with the extension of the New START which remains in force until 2026. Both major powers could also find a way of cooperation in the field of cybersecurity, especially cybercrime, and at least define rules of cyberwarfare. Another area of possible cooperation concerns the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea, as well as climate change and green transition (Suslov, 2021). The latter became easier after the US rejoined the *Paris Agreement*. The war on terrorism was an exception where Russia and the US managed to intensify cooperation during Trump’s presidency (Shakirov, 2020, p. 8). This tendency could continue under Biden. Similarly, both powers will be confronted with a move towards militarization and exploitation of outer space and new regions such as the Arctic, which will require the establishment of rules and a legal framework (Shakirov, 2020, p. 10). The dynamic development, disruptions and innovations in many fields (cyberspace, the Arctic, outer space) will push both Moscow and Washington into interacting and seeking pragmatic solutions. However, the confrontation will be a harsh reality. Russia belongs to the “autocratic camp” and the unprecedented level of cooperation and understanding between Moscow and Beijing is already raising concerns among the liberal democracies. Some experts, therefore, warn about the West’s possible attempts to undermine the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, taking the side of either the Russians or the Chinese (Kortunov, 2021, p. 27). Others even call upon the Western political

⁴³ U.S. – Russia Presidential Joint Statement on Strategic Stability. Kremlin 2021, June 16. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5658> (accessed 20.02.2022)

elites to rupture the “axis of the autocratic powers” (Kendall-Taylor & Shullman, 2021). Still, such a scenario is merely wishful thinking.

Although the 2021 NSS is very concise as far as the relationship with China is concerned⁴⁴, the real state of affairs is much more vivid. Possibly, the laconism of the NSS is intended to weaken the assertions, according to which the Sino-Russian “axis” is a *de facto* alliance, and to emphasize Russia’s multi-vector external orientation, excluding superiority of partnership with one country. Whatever the reasons, the fact is that Sino-Russian relations have reached the highest level in history. The legal framework of the bilateral interactions is defined by the *Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation* concluded in 2001. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the signing of this fundamental document, both sides issued a *Joint Statement*⁴⁵ that reflects the unprecedented development of the comprehensive partnership, demonstrating its specific, innovative nature, being an example of a new type of interstate relations in our era.

The document characterizes bilateral ties as a “comprehensive partnership”, “strategic interaction”, “international relations of a new type” and a “model of harmonious coexistence” based on the “comprehensive consideration of the partner’s interests and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs”. Refusing the concept of a military or political alliance of the past, both actors stress that the partnership is not directed against third sides.⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, we are witnesses of a peculiar phenomenon that can anticipate new forms of interactions in the reformed, polycentric, regions-based order. After all, China is a pioneer of such a shift, if we take into consideration the nature and specific forms of the Belt and Road Initiative, 16+1 (Central and Eastern Europe + China) and other analogic formats in different regions. Unlike these, the Sino-Russian relationship is bilateral and its crucial significance is connected with objective factors, as well as the fact that both major powers are the engines of the Eurasian integration and pillars of the emerging new order.

⁴⁴ Strategiiia natsional’noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Kremlin (National Security Strategy 2021). 2021, July 02. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0pID1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁴⁵ Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China. Kremlin. 2021, June 28. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/en/Bo3RF3JzGDvMAPjHBQAUsemVPWTEvb3c.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The June *Joint Statement*⁴⁷ defines the overall direction and priorities of the Sino-Russian partnership for the ongoing period. (1) The major emphasis is put on Putin-Xi diplomacy as the cornerstone and guarantee of successful development. Mutual meetings at leaders' level are very frequent and regular. The same applies to the lower levels (PMs, ministers or state agencies). (2) Military and military technology cooperation are in second place. It regards not only joint exercises, military exchanges or purchases of armaments but also the reduction of armed forces in the border areas. Both China and Russia have expanded the military cooperation and potential through multilateral platforms, particularly the SCO. (3) The economic and trade ties are seen as a substantial element of the social development and improvement of the people's living standards. The goals are set as follows: (i) to increase the volume of bilateral trade; (ii) to strengthen energy cooperation; (iii) to deepen financial interaction, support the expansion of mutual payments in national currencies in trade; (iv) to strengthen cooperation in the field of industry, information and communication technologies, space and aviation; (v) to enhance cooperation in the scientific and technological innovations; (vi) to ensure protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights; (vii) to increase cooperation in agro-industry; (viii) to deepen interactions in the field of transport; (ix) to strengthen cooperation within the Northern Sea Route (or the so-called Polar Silk Road), promoting sustainable development of the Arctic; (x) to enhance interregional ties. (4) The expansion of interregional ties is of the utmost importance given the obvious tendency towards regionalization as an accompanying phenomenon of globalization at the current stage of development that is typical of the ambivalent logic of integration and autonomization, openness and introversion. The Eurasian macro-region is the most dynamic space in this regard as it includes several grand integration processes, starting with the *Belt and Road Initiative*, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union subsumed into the overarching vision of the *Greater Eurasian Partnership* (GEP), and ending with the European Union in the Western part of Eurasia.

The abovementioned projects (with the exception of the EU) are crucial to redefining the international order, embodying the new paradigm as a perspec-

⁴⁷ Ibid.

tive of the emancipating and rising non-Western world, seeking full-fledged recognition, equity and participation (Zemánek, 2020, p. 200). Not by coincidence, the GEP is mentioned in the recent Russian NSS for the first time ever.⁴⁸ Agreement on the basic values and principles of the international order between Russia and China is crucial as it multiplies the relevance, attraction and influence of the new paradigm. The *Joint Statement* replicates the wording of the Russian strategic documents. The mutual understanding can be demonstrated in Russia's explicit recognition of the China-proposed concept of building a community of shared future for humanity and China's concurrent recognition of the concept of multipolar global order pursued by Russia for a long period.⁴⁹ Both major powers have the identical perception of the main risks in terms of the international stability and security – unilateralism and undermining of the UN-based legal framework (the withdrawal from several arms control agreements made by the US), development of the US missile defense system, building high-precision non-nuclear weapons, militarization and the arms race in outer space, or the so-called *Three Evils* of terrorism, separatism and extremism. Moscow and Beijing make a commitment to pursue multilateralism and keep global stability through developing regional partnerships and integration as a step towards the community with a shared future for mankind, protecting security through the establishment of a global information security system (China's *Global Initiative on Data Security* as an alternative to the US-led *Clean Network*) with the sovereign states' right to regulate the national segment of the Internet, as well as promoting a multilateral and open trading system with the WTO as its core.⁵⁰

Despite being labelled “autocratic”, both Russia and China adhere to democracy and human rights. The cause of controversies between these countries and the West rests in the simple fact that Russia and China admit the existence of multiple democracies and conceptions of human rights.⁵¹ They are more open,

⁴⁸ Strategiiia natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Kremlin (National Security Strategy 2021). 2021, July 02. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0pID1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁴⁹ Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. Kremlin. 2021, June 28. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/en/Bo3RF3JzGDvMAPjHBQAUsemVPWTEvb3c.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of China and Russia on Certain Aspects of Global Governance in Modern Conditions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2021, March 23. URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4647776 (accessed 20.02.2022)

plural and tolerant than the West with its monism and moralism, hampering pragmatic cooperation to the benefit of all members of the global community. The gradual building of the Greater Eurasian Partnership comprising manifold integration processes, development patterns as well as political models, and based on both common interests and shared principles, creates a new normative framework, significantly influenced by Russian perspective as enshrined in the basic national strategic documents. The rising Eurasian community poses a great challenge to the European Union that has been caught in a trap of Euro-Atlanticism. It inevitably complicates relations with Russia and China.

The EU and Russia: seeking a new modus vivendi. The EU elites decided to follow the path of *strategic autonomy*. While commenced in the field of the defense industry, the concept has gradually spread to other fields including economy, technology, politics, research and development or education. The concept became a part of the *Common Security and Defense Policy* (CSDP) in 2013, before the split with Moscow and in the times of the record mutual trade exchange and deepening relations (Shkolyar, 2021). After the crisis around Ukraine erupted, the strategic autonomy expanded into the external policies, being present in the 2016 *EU Global Strategy*. It is a similar process compared to that in Russia where the concept of sovereignty started to be employed in different fields including economy, power industry, information or culture, thus not limiting itself to the foreign policy or military. Securitization of the individual fields is accompanied by the introduction of the concept of sovereignty into new contexts. The same applies to strategic autonomy in the EU. Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, published an article *Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters* in which he explains the reasons for this strategy. Borrell explicitly admits that strategic autonomy is a “process of political survival” given the objective tendency of decline in the European significance and influence in the world.⁵² It is therefore connected with the protection of the “European way of life” (irrespective of the controversial and obscure nature of this term), development of the independent position and

⁵² Borrell, J. B. *Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters*. European External Action Service. 2020, December 03. URL: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (accessed 20.02.2022)

distinctive “mission” within the global community and, last but not least, with the economic base.

Face to face with Trump’s protectionism, unilateralism, growing international instability and rivalry, as well as the coronavirus pandemic, the EU elites noticed the Union’s vulnerability and weak points of interdependence. From this perspective, strategic autonomy can be interpreted as a positive effort to make the EU one of the poles in the multipolar world, globalized and regionalized at the same time. Donald Trump’s America First policy, China’s dual circulation and Russia’s comprehensive sovereignty are of a similar nature even though the individual characteristics vary. Within the EU’s strategic autonomy, Brussels endeavors to boost the international role of the euro, regulate and control foreign investment (through screening mechanisms) or critical infrastructure (including 5G, energy sector or health service) as well as increase the military capabilities. It has launched the European Development Fund (EDF), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), European Battery Alliance (EBA), European Raw Material Alliance (ERMA), Future Combat Air System (FCAS) and many other projects in different fields. The EU aspires to deepen self-sufficiency in some regards, particularly those having strategic significance, to increase domestic production and decrease the role of import where the latter collides with the Union’s interests. In response to the results of the G7 summit in Carbis Bay and following the European Commission’s Asian strategy called *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy* announced in 2018, the Council of the EU approved the basic framework for the initiative *A Globally Connected Europe*, a rival project of the BRI.⁵³ It subsequently materialized in the project of the *Global Gateway* that explicitly declares the goal to expand the “EU’s democratic values”.⁵⁴ The new global infrastructure plan is, however, prepared in close cooperation with Washington, as German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas avowed, and builds on partnerships with India and Japan.⁵⁵ It will

⁵³ A Globally Connected Europe: Council Approves Conclusions. European Council. 2021, July 12. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/07/12/a-globally-connected-europe-council-approves-conclusions/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁵⁴ Global Gateway: up to €300 billion for the European Union’s strategy to boost sustainable links around the world. European Commission. 2021, December 01. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6433 (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁵⁵ Emmott, R., & Siebold, S. After G7 Pledge, EU Seeks to Rival China’s ‘Belt and Road’ with Own Infrastructure Plan. Reuters, 2021, July 12. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/after-g7-pledge-eu-seeks-rival-chinas-belt-road-with-own-infrastructure-plan-2021-07-12/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

therefore be predisposed to become misused for the US-led confrontation with “autocracies”.

The gradual integration of national military capability and formation of the EU army can also be subsumed into the strategic autonomy. Integration in this field poses serious risks in terms of the individual member states, at the same time, however, it can result in emancipation from Washington and NATO or a substantial transformation of the North Atlantic Alliance. Obviously, Borrell understands the importance of the strategic autonomy and its potential, nevertheless, being still unable to overcome the Euro-Atlantic paradigm as demonstrated by the following words: “[N]o one disputes the vital character of the transatlantic relationship and no one advocates the development of a fully autonomous European force outside NATO, which remains the only viable framework to ensure the territorial defense of Europe”.⁵⁶ In fact, the opposite is true. If the EU wants to position itself as an independent center of power, if it aspires to a sovereign policy, if the highest representatives are serious about the need for the EU to assume responsibility for itself, the Euro-Atlantic concept must be abandoned. The EU will not play an independent role in the world if remains subordinated to the US. Until the Union does not emancipate from Washington, integration of the Eurasian macro-region, a common space from Lisbon to Vladivostok and Jakarta free of confrontation and dividing lines will be a mere vision.

Notwithstanding Russia’s pivot to the East, Moscow still reiterates its readiness to deepen cooperation with the EU. Formal ties began in 1997 when the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* (PCA) was concluded, establishing a general framework of the EU-Russian political and economic relations. In 2003, both sides agreed on four “common spaces”, strengthening the strategic partnership. It included the creation of common economic space, cooperation in the field of both internal and external security and justice, research, education and culture. In 2010, Moscow and Brussels launched a new *Partnership for Modernization* on the 25th EU-Russian summit in Rostov-on-Don, addressing common

⁵⁶ Borrell, J. B. Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters. European External Action Service. 2020, December 03. URL: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (accessed 20.02.2022)

challenges and problems, for instance, those emerging from the global economic crisis.⁵⁷ Recently, Foreign Minister Lavrov reminded the progress made by both actors prior to 2014 as well as Russia's proactiveness, when putting forward the *European Security Treaty* to establish a common security area, the idea of a common energy complex, the joint committee on foreign policy and security, cooperation in crisis management or visa-free regime, the latter being a step from realization. Mutual interaction was increasingly intensive at different levels, including the political one. Permanent Partnership Council as the main working body of the EU-Russia cooperation was active, joint summits were held every six months, the Russian Government and the European Commission held a joint session once a year.⁵⁸ The gradual building of Greater Europe was a reality. However, this auspicious development failed in 2014. The EU suspended mutual initiatives, imposed sanctions and joined the US confrontational policy. Since 2016, the EU's approach to Russia is guided by five principles: (1) full implementation of the Minsk agreements; (2) strengthening the Eastern Partnership, involving other countries from the region; (3) building Union's resilience in the field of energy security, hybrid threats or strategic communication; (4) selective engagement with Moscow in chosen areas; (5) promoting people-to-people contacts and supporting Russian "civil society".⁵⁹ The official discourse vis-à-vis Russia remains hostile. The European Council arranged the first strategic debate on Russia in May 2021. The result was not a plan how to improve the relationship but a simple condemnation of the "illegal, provocative and disruptive Russian activities against the EU, its Member States and beyond".⁶⁰

The political confrontation does not correspond with other ways of interaction whatsoever. Irrespective of the restrictive measures, Russia is the EU's fifth-largest trade partner while the EU remains Russia's biggest trade partner. The EU also accounts for up to 75% of all foreign direct investment in the coun-

⁵⁷ EU and Russia Launch New Partnership for Modernization. European Commission. 2010, June 01. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_10_649 (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁵⁸ Lavrov, S. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks at a Conference on Relations between Russia and the European Union. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2021a, May 31. URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4759042 (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁵⁹ EU-Russia Relations: Commission and High Representative Propose the Way forward. European Commission. 2021, June 16. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3010 (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁶⁰ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on EU-Russia relations – Push Back, Constrain and Engage. European Commission. 2021, June 16. URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/joint-communication-eu-russia-relations.pdf> (accessed 20.02.2022)

try. Similar is the situation in the energy sector. Almost two thirds of Russia's oil exports, two thirds of the gas exports and approximately half of its coal exports go to the EU. At the same time, up to 26% of EU oil imports and 40% of gas imports come from Russia.⁶¹ The economic interdependence has thus remained deep. The mutual interactions and exchange would even intensify in case of political normalization. The Russian side has also repeatedly raised the question of linking the EAEU with the EU, but Brussels conditions the debate by normalization.⁶²

The European (and Western) vector is absent in the 2021 NSS, but the Russian leadership have sent messages that Moscow is interested in stable ties and revival of the strategic partnership. Vladimir Putin published an article in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* in June 2021. The Russian President speaks out in favor of “constructive interdependence”, “comprehensive partnership”, “common space of equal cooperation, security and prosperity from the Atlantic to the Pacific”, thus reaffirming the continuity of the basic principles and goals of Russia's European policy regardless of the shift after 2014. Putin emphasizes Russia's cultural and historical affinity with Europe, expressing his long-term belief that the partnership is to be grounded in the close relationship between Moscow and Berlin.⁶³ Sergei Lavrov presented a somewhat more skeptical attitude in December 2020, asserting that even though the EU could play a role of an independent pole in the multipolar global system, it has allegedly given up this ambition as shown by German and French recent policies following the concept of “rules-based multilateralism”.⁶⁴ Multilateralism as such is positive (as opposed to Trump's unilateralism) but the Western notion of it is exclusive and permeated with pseudo-universalism, moralism and superiority. In a sense, it is an expanded unilateralism as it does not accept “the others” on equal terms. The EU's multilateralism is conditioned with adherence to the currently proclaimed

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Lavrov, S. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks at a Conference on Relations between Russia and the European Union. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2021a, May 31. URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4759042 (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁶³ Putin, V. Stat'ia Vladimira Putina «Byt' otkrytymi, nesmotria na proshloe» (Putin: Be Open, Regardless of the Past). Kremlin. 2021, June 22. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65899> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁶⁴ Lavrov, S. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks at a Conference on Relations between Russia and the European Union. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 2021a, May 31. URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4759042 (accessed 20.02.2022)

European (Western) values and rules, to liberal democracy.⁶⁵ The development of the rules-based order (RBO) can undermine the UN-based international system that is multilateral and inclusive. The RBO is liberal in its essence and denies the equal existence of different patterns and models, whether they are political, economic or cultural. These reasons lie behind Lavrov's critical remarks. In another article, the Foreign Minister relates the EU's reinterpretation of multilateralism to the need for an ideological justification in maintaining the West's declining power in the transforming world order.⁶⁶

Russia wants the EU to be a pole in a multipolar system. Not a few political actors in Europe are interested in equal and win-win cooperation with its biggest neighbor, but the decision-making processes continue to be dominated by adherents of Euro-Atlanticism who obstruct normalization and a restart of mutual relations. Signs of a more constructive, rational and pragmatic policy can, nevertheless, be observed throughout the continent. French President Emmanuel Macron stated in May 2021 that anti-Russian sanctions were not working, calling upon the European Commission to rethink its confrontational position.⁶⁷ Shortly after, Macron and Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that maintaining dialogue with Russia was crucial in terms of security and stability.⁶⁸ Both leaders subsequently put forward the idea to convene the EU-Russia summit. However, the initiative was foiled by the Baltic states and Poland.⁶⁹ Hungary, Greece, Italy and Portugal belong to countries that are in favor of normalization, or that are even developing relations with Moscow. Amidst tensions at the beginning of February 2022, Viktor Orbán made an official visit to Russia, showing an example of a constructive, win-win relationship despite Hungary's membership in NATO and the EU.⁷⁰ Viktor Orbán's "illiberal democracy" with multi-vector

⁶⁵ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on Strengthening the EU's Contribution to Rules-Based Multilateralism. European Commission. (2021, February 17). URL: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/en_strategy_on_strengthening_the_eus_contribution_to_rules-based_multilateralism.pdf (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁶⁶ Lavrov, S. (2021). O prave, pravakh i pravilakh (On Law, Rights and Rules). *Global Affairs*, June 28. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/o-prave-pravah-i-pravilah/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁶⁷ Rettman, A. Macron: EU Sanctions on Russia Do not Work. *EU Observer*. 2021, May 26. URL: <https://euobserver.com/world/151946> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁶⁸ Merkel, Macron: 'Russia Is a Big Challenge for Us'. *Deutsche Welle*. 2021, June 18. URL: <https://www.dw.com/en/merkel-macron-russia-is-a-big-challenge-for-us/a-57960118> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁶⁹ Siebold, S., & Emmott, R. France and Germany Drop Russia Summit Plan after EU's East Objects. *Reuters*. 2021, June 25. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-germany-drop-plans-russia-summit-after-eu-outcry-2021-06-25/> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁷⁰ News Conference Following Russian-Hungarian Talks. *Kremlin*. 2022, February 01. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67690> (accessed 20.02.2022)

external orientation and concurrent affiliation to Western structures is an inspiring model. Furthermore, the prospective successful fulfilment of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline would be a symbol of win-win bilateral cooperation with Russia despite US sanctions. It seems that – under the current circumstances – bilateral interactions represent a more viable path compared to the EU-Russia level, which is extremely politicized. Increasing bilateral relations could subsequently affect the collective decisions and actions.

Neither the EU nor Russia will be able to overcome the essential discrepancies in the years to come. The relationship will likely become a “cold partnership” (Fischer & Timofeev, 2020). It corresponds with the EU’s selective engagement policy presented by the Joint Communication on the EU’s relations with Russia in June 2021 in accordance with the five principles guiding the Union’s Russian strategy. Josep Borrell summarized it as follows: “Our ambition should be to explore paths that could help change the current dynamics gradually into a more predictable and stable relationship. The EU will simultaneously push back, constrain and engage with Russia, based on a strong common understanding of Russia’s aims and an approach of principled pragmatism”.⁷¹ The dialectics of confrontation, containment, deterrence, sanctioning on one hand and moderate selective cooperation on the other seem to be the reality of the EU-Russia interactions of the coming years, whether this is called a “cold partnership” or “managed confrontation”.

Conclusion

Interactions between Russia and “the rest” can be characterized in terms of binary alternation of *openness* (and endeavor to follow and adopt external developmental patterns: political, economic, social or cultural) and *introversion*. Prior to 2014, Russia succeeded in integrating into the international structures in many respects but rather as an independent center with its own interests, goals and pretenses, not as a minor, marginal partner of the dominating Western powers. It gradually sobered up from the initial enthusiasm for the West

⁷¹ EU-Russia Relations: Commission and High Representative Propose the Way forward. European Commission. 2021, June 16. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3010 (accessed 20.02.2022)

and the temptation of liberal democracy. Face to face with the NATO expansion eastwards, Western support for Chechen Islamists, separatist forces within Russia, anti-Russian forces in the post-Soviet countries, experiences with wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yugoslavia, the role of the Western countries in the color revolutions, weakening of the central role of the United Nations, stagnation of the West after the 2008 economic crisis and – last but not least – cultural wars and progressivist tendencies in the West, Russia revised its conceptual framework, put an end to Westernization, turned to the East and rejected the Western developmental pattern as an example to follow (Bratersky, 2014, p. 54-55, 60-61). The final reversal happened in 2014 in connection with the crisis in Ukraine. The vision of Russia's integration in Euro-Atlantic security systems including NATO did not take place either. If Yeltsin, Putin or Medvedev (and Gorbachev before them) hoped for the West to recognize Russia as an equal, full-fledged, important and sovereign member of a single Western community, they must have been deeply disappointed (Kotkin, 2001). Russia opened unprecedentedly to the West but the latter remained closed.

What is Russia like today, then? The new, still emergent, post-Soviet Russia is lacking a comprehensive ideology. It avoids extremes, rethinking its position and role in the international order. It rejected the radical openness of the 1990s, refusing to be an isolated fortress. It can rather be characterized as finding a middle path. The absence of a strong, high-profiled ideology need not be a shortcoming for the time being. On the contrary, pragmatism enables flexibility and synthesis of heterogeneous elements. The new Russia has brought an end to dogmatism, messianism and seeking utopia, be it religious (Holy Rus', the Third Rome) or quasi-religious (Communism) (Lukin, 2018a, p. 150). The recent state is close to the Chinese principle of seeking truth from facts. The new Russia wants to revive or safeguard positive traditions and social patterns while adopting external elements where useful or necessary. The ruling elites have realized that building a strong state is an objective need and a rational choice for their country. Historical experiences teach them that Russia cannot get along without this social institute, as otherwise the society falls into chaos, as happened in the *smutnoe vremia* (Time of Troubles) of the early 17th century, after the fall of the monarchy in 1917 or in the 1990s. Andrei Tsygankov (2014, p. viii-ix) observes that a strong state has been advocated by socialists, liberals, conservatives as

well as Eurasianists, and so the question is not whether a strong state will be established in Russia or not – the only question is what the Russian strong state will be like. While combining traditional etatism or patrimonialism, social-liberal economic policies with conservatism in terms of values, Russia develops a “managed” or “illiberal” democracy internally. From the external point of view, Russia cultivates pragmatic relations with different countries, regions and organizations, putting an emphasis on the principles of peaceful coexistence. It wants to be engaged in global processes and institutions, pursuing integration but at the same time insists on independence, autonomy, non-interference. Learning lessons from both the past experiences and the present objective developmental tendencies, the Russian leadership has arrived at *comprehensive sovereignty* and *stability* which is the leading principle of official policies in post-2014 Russia.

In search of a new model of the global order, maintaining some fundamentals of the present one, particularly the central role of the UN, while rejecting others with the unipolar US-based hegemonism at the top, Russia collides and clashes with revisionist attempts of the Western actors who oppose the idea of global polycentric architecture, being imbued with cold-war mentality, confrontational notion of a permanent struggle against “autocrats of the world”, and superiority of liberal democratic model as well as Western values. These characteristics are embodied in the concept of the “rules-based international order” that substitutes the international law and principles emerging from the UN for particularist moral categories and haphazardly introduced rules. Such pressure inevitably provokes resistance among the “rest”. The concurrent containment of Russia and China has also resulted in an unprecedented level of mutual understanding and cooperation between the Eurasian major powers. Both countries’ ambassadors in Washington called for a “harmonious coexistence between countries with different social systems, ideologies, histories, cultures, and development levels” as a basis of what China calls the “community with a shared future for mankind”⁷² in November 2021. Against the Western hegemonism, these Eurasian major powers uphold the legitimacy of pluriversum and diversity, in-

⁷² Antonov, A., & Qin, G. Russian and Chinese Ambassadors: Respecting People’s Democratic Rights. National Interest. 2021, November 26. URL: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russian-and-chinese-ambassadors-respecting-people-s-democratic-rights-197165> (accessed 20.02.2022)

cluding multiple modernities or democracies. This lower-level declaration was reaffirmed by the joint statement of President Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin “on international relations entering a new era and global sustainable development”, made on the occasion of the 24th Olympic Winter Games in Beijing in February 2022. The document can be perceived as a manifesto against hegemonism and militarism as seen in the ongoing NATO expansion or the establishment of AUKUS, thus promoting cooperation and solidarity instead of confrontation and divisions.⁷³

Euro-Atlanticism will be a source of frictions and one of the major obstacles to a peaceful move forward, global restructuring, and the establishment of a common security area including both Europe and Russia. Unless Washington gives up its claims to control the European subcontinent, a sustainable solution of conflicts between Russia and Europe will not be reached. And genuine negotiations about Moscow’s security concerns and national interests are also unlikely to be held, as was shown by the intensified interactions and crisis bargaining in the first weeks of 2022, in which the US and Joe Biden’s himself played an inauspicious role.⁷⁴ Russia’s security requirements aimed at a multilateral, comprehensive security settlement in Europe were denied.⁷⁵

A new impetus to Euro-Atlanticism was given by Biden’s electoral victory. The US President managed to revive the mutual partnership and Western multilateralism based on liberal principles and embodied by the rules-based order. Washington made necessary concessions to overcome the mistrust that emerged under Donald Trump and amid scandals concerning US spying on their European allies.⁷⁶ The EU elites, however, cannot forget the experience with Biden’s predecessor who exposed the allies to serious uncertainty. Trump’s unilateralism and “America First” policy contributed to the development and legitimacy of the strategic autonomy in the EU. Paradoxically, Trumpism played

⁷³ Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development. Kremlin. 2022, February 04. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

⁷⁴ Tsygankov, A. P. Liberal Messianism and the Ukraine Crisis Have Turned Joe Biden into a Russia Hawk. Canadian Dimension. 2022, February 17. <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/liberal-messianism-and-the-ukraine-crisis-have-turned-joe-biden-into-a-russia-hawk> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁷⁵ Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Presidential Address). Kremlin. 2022, February 21. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828> (accessed 20.02.2022)

⁷⁶ Henley, J. Denmark Helped US Spy on Angela Merkel and European Allies – Report. The Guardian, 2021, May 31. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/31/denmark-helped-us-spy-on-angela-merkel-and-european-allies-report> (accessed 20.02.2022)

a progressive role, and made the “autonomization” of individual countries or regions (the US, the EU, China, Russia) inevitable. All these actors have set out a path of development for mobilizing and focusing on domestic sources and potential, and deepening integration with their close partners, thus reaffirming the tendency towards regionalization within globalization. The EU’s strategic autonomy, Russia’s comprehensive concept of sovereignty and China’s dual circulation can be interpreted as a manifestation of the transformation of the global order towards polycentrism. As such, it may avert a slide into a new, China-US bipolarity, even though bipolarity coincides with the West’s predisposition to a dualist or Manichaeian way of thinking (Zhao & Kortunov, 2020). This shift entails the risk of deglobalization, particularism and conflicts, but I expect that given the existing long-term tendencies and trajectories the scenario of *glocalization* and *pragmatic polycentrism* will prevail eventually.

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