



THE STATE OF THE UNION

Europe and Russia: Partnership vs Brinksmanship

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Dear colleagues!

If you ask almost anyone about the state of Russia-EU relations, you will be offered plenty of competent (or not so competent) opinions on what the other side should (or should not) do. In such a context, desire for a compromise dissolves in efforts to prove one's truth or get the better of the other in an argument.

This is a convenient moment for those dreaming to dust off old skeletons from Cold War closets.

Let's come back to our very recent history. Seventy years ago, in March 1946, Winston Churchill made a speech in the American town of Fulton, which many call the beginning of the new confrontation of two political systems.

Of course, the rivalry did not emerge because of the speech by then former and yet to be Prime-Minister of Britain. The cause lay in the diverging interests of the anti-Hitler coalition. The Soviet Union was apprehensive of a new aggression by now former allies. Nuclear race was under way. Europe in turn was tied by an American alliance, having delegated its defense sovereignty to NATO. The next forty years witnessed a face-off of a very high intensity.

Probably, this was unavoidable in the context of the struggle between the communist and capitalist systems. During the time of seeking expansion of influence and putting pressure on partners, and few tried seeking mutual benefit from constructive interaction.

But, even in that situation a number of Western and Soviet politicians, including President de Gaulle, Chancellor Brandt, Prime-Minister Khrushchev and even Churchill himself tried to change the tone of the discourse. One of the instruments of rapprochement along with personal head-of-state meetings was cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, including science, education and culture. We all remember joint work in physics of the Soviet Academy of Science institutions with the institutions in Germany, France, Italy and Britain, Soviet-American Apollo project and many others. However, despite a number of successful projects, the spirit of rivalry and misunderstanding prevented changing the format of the relationship until the eighties and nineties.

That time witnessed a purposeful change of rhetoric by the both parties and a number of steps to cardinaly change the world's geopolitical landscape. The Cold War ended and Russia chose democratic values, which it upholds today.

Why then, after almost thirty years since the end of the Cold War, we turn more and more often to the relationship format it entailed. Perhaps, because it is not just "the Army Generals always prepares to the last war", but also many contemporary politicians prepare to the past world order.

Let's face the truth.

One of the main reasons of the returning confrontation is that the end of bipolar system was treated by many in the West as a sign of victory, and a proof of the primacy of power politics and success of external pressure. This has put a very unstable foundation under the emerging configuration of global and regional politics.

It is true that EU members have demonstrated willingness to strategic partnership and cooperation, but only as part of convergence on the basis of Western ideologies and values (if not outright interests), regardless of how sensible Russia was to this controversial approach.

And yet, the West does not stop seeking pretexts to label Russia the "bad guy". In fact, it is hard for us to believe that any compromises or steps toward Europe may change that. Therefore, the policy of "double red lines" remains the

only way to have our opinion counted: as soon as we are drawn a red line for, we draw one in return. It is fair. By the way, it was stated and explained clearly in President Putin's Munich speech in 2007. Unfortunately, it was not listened to.

The so-called "five new guidelines for the EU-Russia relationship" announced by High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. They demonstrate Europe's willingness to return to the "old world" by freezing practically every form of dialogue and interstate interaction forum created in the past decades. Moreover, the new European approach seeks to put a wedge between the Russian society and the Russian state.

It's results can not limited to economic losses or lost profits, however painful they are for both sides. The price for rejection of cooperation may be much higher. I mean the decline of security globally.

The world stability today already experiences colossal stress – hot spots appear one after the other. Each new confrontation risks becoming a match for a global wildfire. Not only has the three-decade window of opportunity been virtually lost, but so apparently the understanding of the main achievement of the second half of the twentieth century – almost seventy years of peace in Europe.

Dear colleagues!

In Churchill's Fulton speech besides the call to confrontation there was another aspect, which remained in the shadow – a thought that the old world order had ended. Countries needed to create a new world, seek new rules, create – as we say today – the new normal.

Today, we must acknowledge as well that the world has changed. The post-World War II order does not exist, and the one that emerged with the dissolution of the USSR is also gone and will never be same.

Even besides the local armed conflicts, which number has been ever growing since the 90-s, today we pass through a series of crises, face new threats and meet grand challenges. The problems in EU-Russia relations are much less serious than issues of migration, terrorism, ecology and, as a consequence, socio-economic instability in Europe.

Pandemics or climate change may not sound as threatening as war, but don't become unharmed to people's quality of life. For example, the increasing antibiotics resistance can roll our protection against simple infections back to the middle of the last century.

The grand challenges, which motivate science around the world, are similar for different countries: US and China, India and Japan, EU members and Russia. All of them are related in one way or another with people's quality of life. Answering these challenges and finding new opportunities requires an entirely new level of research and education.

Incidentally, this is the area, where Russia and Europe has been consistently succeeding in cooperation. Among the four common spaces between Russia and the EU it is the 'Research, Education and Culture' that succeeded the most.

It is telling that Russia was the most active third party country in all of EU's framework programs. In Hamburg and Darmstadt, Cadarache and Geneva, together we create unique scientific units, allowing to obtain previously unavailable data about live and inorganic matter, come close to understanding the creating of our universe, create new ecologically clean energy sources. Only in the last few years Russia has invested over one and a half billion euro in these joint projects on the EU territory. Thousands of Russian specialists work there. I think you will agree that this is a significant contribution to the common European competitiveness as part of the Neighborhood Policy.

Education and intellectual development rooted in culture and history are also important strategic factors in the development of society. We should not forget the importance of common Russian-European values: from religion to culture, from common history to the very development of statehood and economy.

Dear colleagues!

"Tempora mutantur", as Romans said.

We are on the verge of the new world order. What will it be like? What place will our countries have in it? I doubt anyone knows the answer.

So it is all the more important to create opinion sharing channels and platforms for developing common approaches and institutes for cooperation. We should create them in the areas presenting the joint interest, using the institutions like the esteemed organizer of our conference – EUI.

All of us know how difficult it may be in our world to keep good relationships without sacrificing vital, sovereign interests. Compromising is not the only key to successful peace negotiations and neighborhood policy.

Understanding others, recognizing the right to be different, have different interests and a different identity – these matters are important not only for people, but also for countries and governments.

As well as the people - countries have the right to be various.

My dear friends!

We are ready and willing to create a common space, to bring closer our science, education, culture. We seek collective security and an interconnected economy. We do not think that peace and prosperity in the whole of Europe can be achieved without our joint movement in this direction. But we want this to take place on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis. What we propose to seek is not tactical compromises in a zero-sum game, but a strategy of mutual benefit and strengthening of good neighborhood between Russia and Europe.