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UDK: 321.02 (571) "2012"
Bibliid 0025-8555, 64(2012)
Vol. LXIV, br. 1, str. 7–33
Izvorni naučni rad
Januar 2012.
DOI: 10.2298/MEDJP1201007R

THE BEAR AND THE WORLD: PROJECTIONS OF RUSSIA'S POLICY AFTER PUTIN'S RETURN TO KREMLIN IN 2012

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with projections of Russia's policy after Putin's return to Kremlin in 2012. The focus is made on security and foreign policy issues. They are considered as twinned with the domestic affairs. In part of the paper author examines how the proposed rising of military spending impacts the Russian society, the state politics as a whole, as well as other relevant issues. The author insists that the increase/decrease of temperature of the US – Russia and Russia – the EU relationships is hardly only Russia's concern.

Key words: Russia, Putin's security and foreign policy, the first quarter of the 21 Century.

INTRODUCTION

Since the August 2008 after the five-day war between Georgia and Russia, in which the Russian Federation won, Russia has been pictured in the West as a real bear, not a Teddy bear, and a fear of "the Russian bear" returns to the Americans and Europeans like it was in the days of the Cold

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2 This article is an updated version of the author's presentation at the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society Biannual Conference in Chicago, the USA, on

war.³ No surprise. Generally speaking, the main security concerns, acting together with deep-rooted stereotypes, imbedded in individual perceptions of international politics, are defining a latent network of propositions and, ultimately, building up the general structure of attitudes to the world security. Whether or not, this conscious or unconscious process is a question for further socio-psychological research.

We will not speculate in this paper whether Russia is perceived as the main threat to the US, despite numerous declarations on the strategic partnership and collaboration in the fight against international terrorism and other issues, or not. We do hope that it is not. Such speculations may be fun, but what are they good for? But, we have to note that “bear” is also the symbol of winners in the December (2011) national election, i.e. the pro-Putin political party “United Russia”, which controls the Russian parliament. Add to this the fact that Mr. Vladimir Putin can be elected the next Russian president in spring of 2012 and probably he will keep this post until 2024. He has no serious political rivals and his victory should neither give the opposition a chance to question the result and the legitimacy of Putin’s election nor provoke mass protests in the streets. Thus, all we can speak at the time of writing (December 2011- January 2012) are projections and we are extrapolating the current trends to the nearest future.

The Russian democracy reflects the Russian political culture. The author is definitely sure that the main conclusions he made earlier are still correct. This fact allows us to consider the present paper a continuation of the earlier works and do not repeat what was published before.⁴ We indicate only the opinion trends and do not refer to the exact figures of the Russian public opinion polls; we do not review mountains of relevant literature in the Russian language either, because the paper is addressed to English-speaking readers.

October 21-23, 2011, and the following discussion at the Chicago Council of Global Affairs. The article was prepared especially for journal “International Problems”.

- 3 The reader could recall that the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 broke out just several days after Moscow had completed its military exercise “Kavkaz-2008” in the North Caucasus. The conflict “ended” when Russia announced full independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia. The tensions between Russia and Georgia have been present up today, and, in our view, the relationship between these countries could be worsening if the armed conflict between the USA and Iran emerge in the coming future.
- 4 Vladimir Rukavishnikov, “Putin’s politics and the Russian political culture”, *Central European Political Sciences Review*, Vol. 10, No. 36-37, Summer- Fall 2009, pp. 9-39. See also: Vladimir Rukavishnikov, “Reminding the year of 1993 and re-thinking the Russian transit in retrospect”, *Central European Political Sciences Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, winter 2010, pp. 68-85.

The paper is divided into three sections which are linked to each other. The brief concluding remarks recaps what was said in the paper with a focus on the relationships between the USA and the EU, on one side, and the Russian Federation, on other.

A BRIEF REMINISCENCE AND “HOT” QUESTIONS OF THE FUTURE

Contemporary capitalism in Russia is weak, – yet really oligarchic by nature – perhaps, because of the internal causes, plus because of the used recipes of the Russian transition from centralized economy to a market one. Today, they (the recipes) prove to be ineffective, especially in those countries, which had obsessively recommended them to be used in Russia in the early 1990s. The side effect should be noticed as well – those Russian “Westernizers” (please allow us to use here this old-fashioned term), who strongly determined Russia’s political course in the 1990s, have currently pushed out of Russia’s politics, which is being determined more and more by those who are mentally close to the 19th century “Slavophiles”, i.e. the nationalistic-oriented elite grouping. According to Westernizers, westernization of Russia is an imperative. But, is it true? Modern Russian Westernizers have allowed simply registering the lack of massive Western investments and liberal reforms and always emphasizing a set of domestic and foreign policy mistakes made by the Kremlin as the main argument in support of the idea of the “total failure of the anti-Western and militaristic policy”, and so on. But, the Right-wing political formations along with pro-democratic liberal parties gained no popular support on the national elections in December 2011. The attempt to picture incumbent President Medvedev as Westernizer is a fake. It may be taken for sure that the overall decrease of influence of Westernizers will have an ample effect on Russia’s security and foreign policy during the next Putin’s term.

Democracy is in a poor stand in this country.⁵ Experts around the world share these views. According to the Russian opinion polls, since the early 1990s the words “democracy” and “capitalism” are associated by the bulk of the Russian general public with mass poverty and misery, unfair privatization of public assets and personal troubles as an aftermath of the liberalization of former centralized and planned socialist economy and forced “democratization”. The

5 See: Roger Kanet (ed.), *Russia: Re-emerging Great Power*, 2007, London (UK), Palgrave Macmillan.

Western advisors, the Americans mainly, are blamed for poor results of Russia's transition to a free market economy and democracy.

The image of the post-Soviet Russian capitalism and democracy is strongly associated with bribery and corruption. Efforts of the government to fight against this evil were ineffective so far. However the “hot” question is as follows: Into what form will the Russian capitalism and democracy be transformed in the coming future?

Many people wish to see that the Russian Federation is steadily moving ahead along the path of democratization and to a genuine free market. But! There is an opinion that the only plausible development for this nation in the 21st century is to be the Empire again because Russia can only be governed as an isolated autocracy and that during the Putin-Medvedev's epoch the nation has started its sliding along this path. There are certain reasons for such an opinion. And, because we cannot ignore this unpleasant variant of development we should say a few words about the evolution of Russia's political system.

For many Russians, Boris Yeltsin, the first President of post-Soviet Russia, was personally responsible for devaluation of the idea of democracy in Russia and a poor standing of the nation in global affairs; the public opinion says he was responsible for Russia's crisis in the 1990s more than others of his “young reformers” team. The transfer of power from Yeltsin to his successors had not been performed according in accordance with democratic norms, despite the fact that Mr. Putin as Yeltsin's protégé got an overwhelming support of voters. Almost everybody in the country was happy to get rid of that “sick man” by the end of 1999 and to vote for Mr. Putin.

During the 1990s post-Soviet Russia was a young pseudo-democracy with formally guaranteed human rights and democratic liberties. Most social scholars agreed with this definition. However, we have described Russia of the 1990s as *anocracy*. In our view, this is a more correct definition. By the end of Yeltsin's reign, governability became a real national problem. It was, perhaps, the political and economic problem Number One. There is no such problem today thanks to Mr. Putin.

Russia under Mr. Vladimir Putin became a quasi-democracy with certain authoritarian traits. Putin created the “vertical of power”, which simplified the procedure of naming governors of provinces, heads of regional police departments, and so on. However, in fact, he went along the well-known path as a good student of the Western political history, at least, in our opinion. To complete this remark we should note the following. The reader, of course, could

remind the so-called “social contract” as a relevant story. However, in our opinion, no new “social contract” or a treaty/ balance of duties, between the society and power-holders could be established in modern Russia as it could be in good old Britain. (For the lack of room we shall not debate this issue in the paper as well the view whether the revolutionary scenarios, which had been realized in Europe in XVIII-XIX centuries and in developing countries in the XX century, have totally exhausted or not.)

During his 8-year long stay in Kremlin as the Head of the State (2000-08) Vladimir Putin, the second Russian President, presented to the public very different principal tasks for each four years’ term.⁶ Strengthening of the state – or of Putin’s personal power, as his opponents said, – had become the central theme in the first Putin’s term (2000-04). But since foreign affairs could not be ignored, Putin’s emphasis on the fight against Chechen and international terrorism after the September 11, 2001 tragedy in the USA has provided a convenient formula for melding the domestic affair with the foreign one into a basic theme in a dialogue with Western leaders. The accent on fighting against terror as a common threat helped the US and the RF to smooth the criticism of the Western media concerning the process of reduction of democracy in Putin’s Russia. During his second presidential term (2004-08), Putin reinforced the priority placed on domestic affairs; the concept of foreign policy as an extension of domestic politics had the side effect of further deterioration of relations with the West. Below we shall discuss his Munich’s speech.

Some scholars say that resurgent Russia is an *emerging democracy*.⁷ Perhaps, this is also true. Russia has a weak democratic tradition, indeed. And we do agree that the move from the “Russian version of anocracy” to the so-called “soft variant of personality cult of Putin” has resulted in the present-day situation.

Today, in Russia there is a new and unique form of political regime which was established after Yeltsin’s anocracy in the 1990s and Putin’s quasi-democratic authoritarianism of the early 2000s and it is ironically titled as *tandemocracy*. The entire term is an ironic definition of the current power-sharing arrangement between Putin and Medvedev used by the Russians; the word had been derived not from “democracy” but from “tandem” as a bicycle for two. As the reader may know the back rider on this kind of bike smells the

6 This point is tackled in: Richard Sakwa, “Putin’s Leadership: Character and Consequences”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2008, Vol. 60, No 6, pp. 879-897.

7 Roger Kanet (ed.), *Russia: Re-emerging Great Power*, 2007, London (UK), Palgrave Macmillan.

T-shirt of the pilot and must pedal, following his orders. Everyone in Russia knew who has been a pilot in the 2008-2012 period. The political essence of this artificial construction remains the same under Putin as Russia's President. In fact, Prime Minister Putin ruled all politics, including foreign affairs, during the rule of Medvedev as President; we do not foresee a radical change in the ruling regime in Russia if the riders will formally exchange places (positions in the state apparatus) after the elections in March 2012.

Of course, politically, economically, and socially Russia will change, but the changes will be visible only in the remote future, because this nation is mentally changing gradually and very unpredictably. And we are sure that this is true. This nation is a nation of patient and decent people. The ethno-psychological characteristics of the people in Russia have been formed over centuries and the Russian national character will not become much different in the foreseeable future. In the case of Russia, the national mentality together with the historical past is mainly responsible for continuities and not rapid changes; most likely the cumulative effects of the political and cultural factors along with a joint impact of the national economic and political history are responsible for the past and only partly for the present and upcoming changes.

There is every reason to believe that Putin is seeking to be the elected President of Russia on March 4, 2012. Given the inevitable continuation of the national "authoritarian-personalistic" mental system (in terms of the popular attitude towards governing), if Putin is successful, he (as the elected President) can easily and cheeky move from an old-fashioned authoritarianism to a new, modern type of authoritarianism, i.e. to a kind adjusted to the changed reality. But will he? As for the domestic liberal critics of Mr. Putin, we can say that today they are occupying the marginal position in the eyes of the public at large. The marginal position of the Russian liberals has, in our opinion, resulted not only from the efforts of authorities, but to a large extent from the exported ideas and personal behavior of the liberal opposition leaders themselves. They are really not concurrent to Mr. Putin at the elections in March 2012, yet they are supported by the West, a small part of liberal editors and a tiny group of the so-called "middle class street protesters against the results of parliamentary elections". It is easy to see the points in which our opinion differs from the diagnosis of the Western analysts.⁸

⁸ Compare with: Robert Horvath, "Putin's Preventive Counter-Revolution': Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2011, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1-25.

The principal aim of the coming post-election period (or the next one-two Putin terms) is creating of the Eurasian Union, the new integration project that should replace the CIS or strengthen control over the so-called Hartland, if one prefers the old-fashioned geopolitical lexicon.⁹ All kinds of politics will be subordinated to this aim.

The basic aim of social politics of the coming future is to smooth (a bit, at least) the hugest income inequality in this country. The authorities have no other chance but to rise up the standard of living of the ordinary Russians. Simultaneously, the government is keeping untouched the rich. Thus, the big government continues to ‘flirt’ with the military, teachers, physicians and other intellectuals, and, finally, with pensioners, making an impression of improving their living conditions and levels of living. In the protracted global economic crisis, such actions are almost inevitable.

The ruling elite understands that Russia needs improving of the business climate, reducing of the level of corruption, creating of a real competitive environment as well as the so-called “institutional reforms” – an actual judicial independence, fair elections with a real political competition, etc., and, perhaps, that is why the main rulers (President Medvedev personally) continue to speak about “modernization”. Everybody amongst the ruling elite agree that during the next Putin’s term Russia will have to carry out new economic modernization (the capitalist “tsarist or pre-revolutionary” modernization – number one, the Stalin’s “forced socialist” modernization (industrialization) in the 1930s – number two, the Gorbachev’s “acceleration” – number three, etc.), but not everyone amongst the ruling elite understands properly that full-scale modernization has also non-economic dimensions. “Overtaking (or catching up) the West” is not present Russia’s ideal. The nation as a whole is politically Left-oriented and the elections in December 2011 demonstrated it transparently clearly. In short, the term “modernization” is not perfect in the present (post-Soviet) Russian case. It is ideologically loaded and disorienting, in our view.

Mr. Putin made a statement clarifying his economic plan for the post-election terms in December 2011; then, the basic ideas of this plan were repeated in the so-called “Putin election program” released in January 2011. It became obvious that the ambitious goals linked with the Eurasian Union could be solved only within the framework of new “industrialization”; i.e. a new model of economic growth in which the principal driver would not be raw and powerful sectors of economy, but high-tech manufacturing business. Investments in the economy

9 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Second Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, 2004, New York, Basic Books.

over the next three years should be about 43 trillion rubles, that is nearly the entire volume of the country's GDP in 2010. The details of this plan are not clear today and without all details it looks more like an electoral declaration. To realize Putin's "new industrialization" plan will be extremely difficult in view of the upcoming large-scale social programs and the ongoing military reform. This part of Putin's election program is mixed with promises to rise up pensions, salaries of state employers, and other populist measures to be implemented in the coming future. Thus, the social, political, fiscal and economic policies as well as the security and foreign ones are inter-twinned.

Putin's opponents say that the very idea of "new industrialization" (a new proposal of a type of "modernization without modernity" as the one in the Soviet period) may seem to lead to two plausible scenarios of further economic development – either militarization and stagnation or just a stagnant economy, – of course, if one considers only 'favorable' scenarios. Putin program proponents angrily argue in a response that the nation will soon see who is right in predictions, and this debate is continuing endlessly. "Modernizing" economy is the main goal of Putin's economic policy, but nobody knows for sure if this goal is achievable considering the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 or the announced Russian economic modernization is just an electoral slogan. Concerning the Russian budget for the next three years (2012-2014) it is already known that the social costs will be reduced, while the military will be increased.

Up to date the Russian Federation's top political, military, and diplomatic and security staff have relied strongly on the national nuclear might for the security of the nation, despite the fact that nuclear weapons are perceived in today's world as weaponry of poor and weak nations and that according to the media, such a view is expressed more and more often. However, perhaps, they are right, in part at least. In fact, the national nuclear potential is the only reliable guarantee that nobody will attack your country today. Take a look at North Korea and Iraq. Even after the START-3 reduction Russia's strategic nukes are still an existential threat to the US and NATO because, as some Russia's military arrogantly say "we can destroy the entire planet in a half of an hour". The final elimination of Russia's nuclear weapons arsenal is still a remote target. Currently, Russia is renovating its nuclear stocks. The tactical nuclear weapons stocks are considered a basic military argument that makes Russia a real regional power.¹⁰ The entire process of denuclearization of the Russian Federation is perceived by the military with great suspicion.

10 Коробушин В. В., Ковалев В. И., "Тактический ход с тактическим оружием, *Независимое Военное Обозрение*, 18 Март 2011.

The national military might is an essential element of power. Putin's Russia is rapidly reforming the armed forces and the national military-industrial complex. The Russian armed forces are (and will likely be) a mix of conscripts and contractors (soldiers, NCOs and officers). The armed forces are changing because the share of contractors is slowly growing up and re-arming is on a march. By the end of the coming Putin's terms the Russian leadership wants to have a small, mobile, professional (or all-voluntary) and well-armed military force loyal to the ruling elite, i.e. to the President and state authorities. In our opinion, this goal is an indirect answer to the principle question (both for sociology and political science): "Who will be controlling the Praetorians in the future?" With such armed forces Russia will certainly not be a teddy-bear, but the crucial question is: Will the nation be a democratic one?

Russia's Presidents often make statements about the future of the army on the eve of the elections. The first statement on military reforming was made in 1996 by Boris Yeltsin, who signed the famous decree number 722 promising to cancel the call by 2000. Needless to say that Yeltsin election campaign rhetoric had never been implemented completely. Another attempt was made in 2003 by Vladimir Putin when he approved the Federal Target Program (FTP) with a cost of about 79 billion then rubles; the FTP planned to end in four years. Putin's opponents said in 2004: "Mr. Putin was re-elected on a nationalist platform of 'restoring' Russia's military greatness". The course of speeding of military reforming was continued by the incumbent President Dmitri Medvedev. By 2011, according to the plans of the Ministry of Defense, the Russian Army should have had 350,000 contractors within the army of about 1 million servicemen. It is not to the author's knowledge whether the plans were fulfilled at the time of writing the paper or not.

Here are some sociological facts for further consideration: trust in the armed forces in today's Russia is "relatively high" (table 1); the number of conscious absentees (about 500 persons) is actually "rather small" as compared to the total number of conscripts – over 100,000 men (here we are referring to the estimates of Western military sociologists made in private talks with the author). Do these facts help the reader find the correct answer to the question that was earlier made? We can only guess.

Table 1. Russian public opinion on armed forces in 2011

Approve/ Disapprove	II.11	III.11	IV.11	V.11	VI.11	VII.11	VIII.11	IX.11	X.11
Russia's Army	54 /25	49/ 30	45/ 33	49/33	46/ 32	44/ 33	48/ 33	41/ 35	48/35

Source: Data of the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM – in Russian) nationwide surveys; the margin of error – less than 3.4% (<http://vciom.com/index.php?id=123>). The question wording is approximately as follows: “Do you generally approve or disapprove the ...?” (A closed question, 1 response).

Another important question is how the proposed rise of military spending impacts the Russian society and politics. The intellectual opponents of the military reforming insist that the way it is conducted today lead to the widest corruption amongst officials, plus further eliminating of ordinary people from power, plus extremely large income inequality and poverty, etc. Ordinary people rhetorically ask whether the continuation of reforming in the coming future will bring a relief to the military and the society at large. The uncertainty concerning the end of military reforming increases doubts in its efficiency.

Easy to say, the anti-Putin opposition “put all eggs into one basket” of criticism and thus, put opposition members under a back fire. In fact, there is a dispute over the general attitudes to lesser-fair market and democracy, because a bulk of that people took a pro-Western liberal point of view that the basic contradictions in the Russian society were autocracy versus democracy and closure versus openness of the country to the Western economic and cultural penetration. And we are not ready to say that the authorities have remained silent to the voices of the opposition; certain shifts are visible, yet the main opposition demands are ignored.

Mr. Putin insists that he will not repeat the former Soviet Union mistakes either in the political policy or in the defense strategy. He, at the same time, strongly and repeatedly emphasizes the urgent need to increase Russia's defense expenses and to speed up the renovation of the Russian armed forces. The sophisticated so-called “smart” weapons and huge ocean submarines with a plenty of intercontinental missiles on board are being produced in the present-day Russia; and what we watch today is a new acceleration of arms race in the Russian Federation and the rest of the world as well. Putin's opponents in Washington, Beijing and Moscow, in turn, raise the question: “Against what enemy the leader of Russia is preparing to fight?” And this is really a “hot”

question for the future. No matter what the politicians say while the nuclear stockpiles exist, each of the mentioned nations had no other bigger enemies than the opposite sides.

The reader remembers, of course, that in first half of the first quarter of the 21st century the climax of Putin's anger against the West as a whole, and the USA in particular, was his speech in Munich on February, 10 2007 at the International Security Forum. In our view, Russia's President had then certain reasons for expressing a deep disillusionment with the West because of his failed attempts to establish truly friendly relations with the USA: Putin's arguments could not stop the US withdrawal from the 1972 ABM Treaty in 2002; his concessions after 9/11 could not prevent the war in Iraq in 2003 with the consequent occupation of this country; Putin's warnings could not prevent making of the decision on deploying US interceptors in Europe close to Russia's borders and could not stop NATO's enlargement to the East promising to admit Ukraine and Georgia in the Alliance in the future, etc.

After Munich, Mr. Vladimir Putin was branded by the global media as a "disloyal friend" of the USA. We shall not debate here if this label was fair or not. The *Washington Post* columnist summarized the impression of Putin's Munich speech in following words: "He does not want to bury us; he only wants to diminish us. [...] Putin does not want us as an enemy. But at Munich he told the world that, *vis-à-vis* America, his Russia has gone from partner to adversary".¹¹

Of course, there is no direct external enemy to the Russian state, but there are numerous threats to Russia's interests that exert impact from the outside world. And for this reason, we should all note that the assertion that there are no external threats refers to how the outside world is perceived by the elite is reflected in the Russian strategic documents. We are speaking of the basic strategic documents such as the National Security Doctrine of the RF, the Military Doctrine of the RF, the Foreign Policy Concept of the RF, the Sea Doctrine of the RF, the Information Security Doctrine of the RF, and alike. These documents will be re-worked and re-issued in/after 2012.

The basic domestic threats and external concerns, both military and non-military, are reflected in all documents revealing the national "grand strategy" (we use the American term which is not very popular among the Russian experts; we shall not tackle the issue of domestic threats here for the lack of

11 Charles Krauthammer, "The Putin Doctrine", *The Washington Post*, 16 February 2007, A23 (on web).

room). Generally speaking, the doctrines and other relevant documents demonstrate the commitment of Russia to the use of a complex of political, diplomatic, legal, economic, environmental, information, military and other instruments to protect national interests of the country along with national interests of its allies and emphasize the need of evaluation and prediction of development of military-political situation at the global and regional levels, a shift from the one-center to the multi-center world as well as the current status of interstate relationships in the military-political sphere. How this encouraging commitment works or how a co-ordination of effects of various agencies is realized in practice are intriguing questions out of our paper.

Comparing the aforementioned documents issued in different periods of time it is easy to find out changes in perceptions of external threats and global challenges along with an impact of changes on the domestic socio-economic and political situation and on Russia's international environment as well; it is important to note that the most modern threats and contemporary security challenges such as cyber threats and alike are occupying the subordinate positions to traditional ones in almost all principal Russia's documents. This fact, in our opinion, reflects both the old-fashioned world-vision of aging security experts and the way of thinking of Russia's decision-makers; a detailed analysis of Russia's doctrinal documents takes us far from the paper. We have no room for a comparison of the US – or, larger, Western – strategies and Russian ones either.

After a long time of knocking, Russia became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In means that Putin team's efforts are awarded. In this regard, we wish to emphasize the following: According to the Russian mainstream media numerous reports (please, allow us not to quote them), some members of WTO slowed Russia's entering the World Trade Organization because of their opposition to Russia's economic prospects, not a difference of values between Russia and the West as some Western observers said. But because of the link between the economy and national hard and soft power, the Russian access to the WTO has an important security and/or geopolitical sounding.

Happily, the new international conflict driven by geopolitics and backed by other motives has not broken out so far. And we expect calm development of international relations in the coming post-election period. Certainly, Russia will continue the US-European-Russian dialogue on TMD systems, terrorism and other collective security issues. No doubt, it looks absurd to discuss how to safeguard soldiers against small-range missile attacks while turning a blind eye to the practice of creating of advanced warheads and other kinds of smart weapons

under the cover of “successful” NATO-Russia or the US-Russia summits. But! Russia under Putin-Medvedev’s tandem backs any change that can dilute the American influence. In our view, this tendency will go on in the foreseeable future because of mutual mistrust, global rivalry, and non-essential reasons.

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

The Russians used to think of themselves as citizens of the fortress surrounded by enemies. The Putin administration is eager to use such a perception in the coming future. The rulers always use this mood during the election campaigns. In short: “Russia, as always, is surrounded by enemies, America and its minions are building plots, but the authorities are on alert in time and give enemies hand to hand”.¹² The target audience for the governmental propaganda is the one with people who are today about 40-50 years old, and, probably, those who are a bit younger. The ‘collateral’ task is the improvement of Russia’s “soft” power, whose current status is far from being desirable.¹³

Some Western colleagues said to the author that the perception of Russia as a nation within an unfriendly environment had been imprinted into brains of the Russian population during the Cold war. Perhaps, they are right – partly at least, no doubt. Yet, younger people, according to the author’s observations, have a vision of the nation’s place in the world a bit different than their parents and grandparents because they actively travel abroad and because they do feel themselves more modern and most likely they are freer people. (We are not talking in detail here how the eternal threats to Russia are perceived by the each age cohort.)

The Putin plan of creating the Eurasian Union as the Eastern analog of the EU during his third, and, probably, the fourth, presidential term is perceived by some Russia’s neighbors with a great skepticism and interpreted as an open intention to enlarge Russia to the borders of the former Russian Empire, to restrain the American influence in the post-Soviet space, to limit the power of the national/local bureaucracy, etc. They say approximately as follows (this is not a quotation): “The Russians cannot accept that someone else can control the neighboring states which they still view as parts of their great motherland, the

12 A quotation taken from: http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2011/11/25_e_3847950.shtml (in Russian).

13 Vladimir Rukavishnikov, “Russia’s ‘soft power’ in the Putin’s epoch”, Ch. 4 in: Kanet R. (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st century*, Palgrave, 2010, pp. 76-97.

former USSR.” Though this version contains some truth, it is, in our view, an oversimplification, being taken as a whole. Yet, we must agree that the implementation of the very idea of the Eurasian Union in practice needs an accumulation of all Russia’s assets and, certainly, has certain negative collateral effects. The entire idea is a logical continuation of Russia’s policy in the previous years; the relations with close neighbors will be subordinated to the principal aim of the coming Putin’s terms. For instance, in 2011, the post-Soviet Russia was accused of unleashing trade wars to force the Kremlin opponents to economic and political “compromises”, which were beneficial for Moscow. Unfriendly (towards Russia) views were expressed primarily in the GUAM countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). Do not forget, please, that the czarist’s Russia had never believed its neighbors, both in the West and in the East. They all paid to the Russian czarist authorities with the same coin.

In short, it is hard to foresee the radical change of the Russian foreign policy in the near neighborhood and the Balkans as well in the nearest future (we have no room to talk here about the “South Stream” project and the so-called “pipeline-diplomacy” in details).

In our view, the main security concern for the Russian authorities is not an immediate military threat from abroad, which they are actually not feeling today, but the internal threats caused by the non-stopped counter-terrorist operation in the area of Northern Caucasus, a growth of xenophobia, and some other domestic reasons. The reader may recall the famous phrase of Vladimir Putin “We’ll whack them [terrorists] at the outhouse” (the author’s translation from Russian into English). In reality, fighting against “them” is not an easy task. The Chechnya war was successfully finished in 2000 – formally at least, – but its remains are still burning. Look at the number and variety of terrorist actions in Russia since 9/11. Over the past 10 years in Russia, terrorists have blown up the metropolitan subway, planes, trains, the Domodedovo airport hall, and seized hostages in a high school, not to mention the numerous bombings in cafes and at bus stops, attacks on buildings and representatives of security agencies. This list confirms that the Russian local and federal authorities were, unfortunately (!), not prepared for terrorist attacks. Will they be ready the next time is a question to which we do not have the exact answer. Looking ahead, we can say that fighting against Muslim extremists/terrorists in this vast country will be continued and included in the list of priorities of the domestic politics.

Some people consider corruption and bribery the main internal threat to the present-day Russian state and society. However, in our opinion, today, the entire statement looks more like the temporal, electoral campaign slogan. Only

the future can show how effective are the measures to overthrow corruption amongst authorities at all levels. Others say that Islam is replacing communism as the unstoppable ideology and it is what is actually happening in the Muslim regions of the Russian Federation. And this ideological offensive is a major security threat! – Sounds great! If this appeal is not just a rhetoric statement, but a politically relevant one, then, in our opinion, it must be taken seriously.

THE MOST URGENT NATIONAL PROBLEMS AND THE RUSSIAN PUBLIC OPINION

The decline of the Russian population is a real threat to the future of the nation in the 21st century. The attempts to change the present alarming situation have not been too effective so far. The fight against the demographic threat will continue in the years to come. This is a question of survival.

There are alarming statistical facts and demographic forecasts that should be mentioned. First, the country's population over the past 20 years has declined by about 5% and there are currently less than 142 million inhabitants. Second, from 1992 to 2010, there were about 12.5 million deaths more than births. Third, in the time remaining until 2025, the overall excess of deaths over births will amount, according to the various estimates, up to 9.5 million; yet the Russians average age will rise from 38.7 to 42.4 years, the proportion of people over 65 years will rise from 13% to 19%; according to the Human Mortality Database, the average life expectancy in Russia in 2009 (no more recent data) was lower than in 1961. All in all, it means that the nation is rapidly aging and likely dying.

Economists, on the contrary, optimistically say that if Russia stems a population decline, it can easily reach the level of gross national product (GDP) which matches those of the most successful developing economies or even developed European economies in the 2020s. We shall not argue about these projections. No room. But obviously a country enters a fundamentally new stage in its development because of the demographic and economic changes.

As for the mass emigration to the West, it is not a question on the national agenda and the public opinion polls prove this. According to the plain respondents, those Russian businessmen willing to leave the country are driven by the opportunity to increase their standard of life and not by ideological reasons; respondents do think that these people rarely achieve their goals.¹⁴

14 ВЦИОМ, *пресс-релиз № 1394*, М., 28 сентября 2011 г. (The press release # 1394 of the VCIOM (the Russian Centre for Public Opinion Research) Moscow, September 28, 2011).

Here, we must say a few words about the migration to Russia or immigration as one of the most urgent problem heavily linked with the growth of xenophobia. According to the media, the demographic crisis in the historical ethnic Russian regions coupled with the growing influx of migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia set the stage for new ethnic exacerbations in this country. And therefore, the immigration problem, which includes negative attitudes towards those ethnic Russians who came to the central provinces from both Northern Caucasus areas and formally independent ex-Soviet republics, should be regarded as an alarming one. In our view, the non-stop process of mass migration from neighboring states to Russia may lead to significant, if not radical, changes in domestic cultural patterns of the Russian life and even have an impact on the Russian social and political system in the foreseeable future.

The public at large has been very impressed by the nationalist protest rallies against immigrants in Moscow as polls show. Happily, the gloomiest forecasts have not come true so far. Keeping in mind the fruitless discussions of Russia's modernization prospects organized by the current presidential administration, it is important to note that a significant share of Caucasian and Central Asian immigrants is really interested in how to live and rise up their children in Russia, i.e. how to invest their physical efforts and intellectual capital in the Russian Federation. This makes the migrant problem really a 'long-playing' story.

Let us turn back to the defense policy. For the most of Russia's population, Moscow is absolutely right in an opposition to America and Europe on the issue of elements of US national missile defense (NMD) and NATO's anti-missile shield located near the Russian borders. But simultaneously, according to the polls, Russians are against the shift to a new Cold war between Russia and the West because of the issue concerning the missile defense; as they say, 'it might be a mistake of the 21st century'.

In plain words, the Russians asked Americans to say why the US defense shield interceptors were directed against the Russian intercontinental missiles that could be launched from the Western part of the RF; the reader might remember the moment when the Russian diplomacy did not rule out the possibility of just a joint political declaration on the issue, but got no positive answer from the opposite side. Here, we must say that, perhaps, some Europeans and Americans find it hard to understand, but, for the lack of trust to the West and the deeply-rooted anti-American attitudes the US and/or NATO plans for creating of anti-missile shields in Europe are perceived as provocative ones by the bulk of the Russians, who remember promising words about NATO expansion to the East, etc. As for Russia's demands to sign a mutually

obligatory legal agreement, Russia clearly wants to arrange that the problem of missile defense is not going anywhere and that any attempts to bypass or ignore it will not succeed. The legal side of agreement is debatable; the legal obligations are not the same as the political commitments. As for the subject there might be political commitments, but without legal obligations the pleasant wordings could easily be thrown away. According to the Russian TV and mainstream electronic media sources, the Russian military are confused about the real targets of the US NMD elements deployed in Europe and Turkey. We shall not speculate here about what would happen to a warhead after a successful boost-phase missile defense engagement, would it detonate or not after the intercept strikes the target.¹⁵

There is a Russian proverb, “Against whom should we be friends?” We do not know how old this proverb is. In the author view, the proverb reflects an age-long history of the nation. The history has demonstrated that the ideological characteristics of the ruling regime in Russia do not matter much. However, in the 21st century new global challenges come. One could name global climate changes and global warming, non-stopped population growth, non-finished fight against global poverty plus land degradation, a growing shortage of drinking water, international terrorism, human organs and drugs trafficking, and so on. There is no need to name all newly emerged threats and challenges here.

Is the climate change a real major global security threat? – This particular issue has been vividly discussed because of the forest fires around Moscow in 2010, hurricanes and other catastrophic events. As the opinion polls showed, ordinary people were concerned about plausible consequences of climate changes. It was an effect of alarming media reports; in our view, the public at large had been feared by “documentaries” broadcasted by TV.

Russian academics, being governmental advisors, are skeptical about the very idea of a huge human impact on climate processes. “Prospects for the current global warming are not very comforting, of course, but they are not as terrible as they are today considered by the media”, – say the Russian academic climate experts in private conversations (from the author’s archive). Frankly, in our non-professional opinion, they simply do not know how to deal with possible atmosphere disasters, ice melting, etc.

It is uneasy, if ever possible, to select global security issues from the fight for dominance in the world, for the global leadership, or whatever to name this

15 Vladimir Rukavishnikov, “The US-Russian dispute over missile defense”, *Connections*, Vol. 7, No. 4, fall 2008, pp. 81-94.

issue. Russia's "skeptical" position concerning the UN ability to minimize effects of the global climate change is well known and documented. Dear reader, you should remember the failure of the UN summit on climate change in Copenhagen and perhaps, you do know that Russia is still skeptical concerning the idea of "green helmets" and it is not a pioneer in the so-called "green" politics. Well, in our view, the new Putin's terms will not bring a visible change in a "green" dimension, if something extraordinary does not happen in this domain.

The point we wish to notice in this regard is that climate changes are not occupying the first positions in the official list of immediate national security concerns of the Russian Federation. Perhaps, the Russian authorities "won't lock the barn door till after the horse is stolen" (sorry for using such a proverb).

The new global threats put under the question mark the entire existence of humans. All nations are responsible for the future of the mankind. And Russia feels its responsibility as well. The above-mentioned proverb, in our opinion, should be rephrased as against what will us becoming allies?" In the present-day circumstances this task becomes even more important than ever before.

"War may come from each side unexpectedly" – this simplest idea has been inherited from the past and is deeply implemented in brains of the Russian population. The growing flood of drugs and illegal migrants is registered on Southern Russia's borders, which are not sufficiently guarded. Neighboring China is perceived as an awakening giant. A plenty of illegal migrants come from this country. Please, do not forget that the most recent census has registered a significant decline in the Russian-speaking population of the Russian Far East and Siberia. People are leaving the mentioned areas partly because they are afraid Moscow cannot protect them. They simply have no means. As for the Western borders, they are always associated with the permanent threat of aggression, because during the last century all big wars came to this country from this direction. NATO is seen as a non-friendly military alliance, the main US military-political instrument in Europe by both the authorities and the public at large. The Russians do not forget the Balkan tragedy in the 1990s and the role of NATO in those events.

Ordinary Russians are sure that the recent events in the Middle East "smelt of oil" and that the main principle of international law is still the priority of force, despite official declarations about many other pleasant things. The way of Western conflict-resolution in the case of Afghanistan has demonstrated the limits of peacekeeping efforts of NATO backed by the US and also the inefficiency of any military solutions of crisis developments. As for the Russian

foreign policy, the unskilled Russia's diplomatic maneuvers around the Libyan (2011) crisis is a reflection of how top power-holders in this country interpret national interests, perceive threats, being potential and immediate, and, finally, understand modern geopolitics; the responsibility of the expert community should not be written out as well. Without going into details, we wish to point out the following idea: the chain of armed conflicts emerged during the first decade of the 21st century, including the Arab uprising (2011) and other events, has clearly shown that the entire constellation of powers in the political world is rapidly changing. The projections of the future are controversial.

The attentive reader may say that the Russians traditionally are looking with a great suspicion to all azimuths watching potential enemies. It is true, – partly, at least. Happily, after the Russia-Georgia military clash in 2008 political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic generally agree that the West and Russia are not returning to the Cold War – partly because the chilling of relations during that incident was not an ideology, but a conflict of political/geopolitical interests. And perhaps, that is why the international rhetoric today more likely refers to strategic partnerships, economic cooperation, spheres of influence and globalization (we are not rejecting other interpretations of those events). As the reader may know, Mr. D.A. Medvedev, the incumbent Russia's President, considers the entire post-Soviet space an inherited historical zone of the Russian national interest; such a statement he made in days of the Georgia-Russia armed conflict in 2008.

Well, national interest – geopolitical, economic, and alike, – is the main driving force of politics, while values are only a part of the basis for politics. This was a debatable thesis some time ago, but is a perfect one today, in our opinion. For sure, the US and Russian national interests confront each other in the entire Eurasian area, not to speak of the European and/or Chinese interests. Ordinary Russians express feelings of outrage at what they view as Western incursions into the post-Soviet republics through pro-democracy revolts and angrily react to any attempts to change the status-quo; the opinion polls demonstrated it transparently clear. Again for the lack of room, we shall not debate whether such a perception corresponds with the reality of time or not. What we wish to emphasize is that the Russians always feel responsibility for the entire post-Soviet area; they will continue to support such a policy in the future.

For Mr. Putin, the present-day global economic-financial recession is coming to an end and if the second wave of economic recession suddenly appears, according to his rhetoric, he can easily cope with it. Perhaps, he is sure about high oil prices in the nearest future and shares an opinion that the 21st

century is an age of various asymmetric small wars and numerous local conflicts caused mainly by interethnic contradictions, while a big nuclear war, the real third world war, is practically impossible. Vladimir Putin obviously believes that hydrocarbons play a key role in making Russia a global power in the first quarter of the 21st century. The Siberian oil and gas fields and likely Arctic fields, too, are certainly, at the back of his mind. Here, we should mention that at the very beginning of the 21st century Russia got the name “energy superpower”, “which one day may determine the global foreign policy”, but today this label is not valid any more (though it is funny enough to note that the “free” name has been picked up by Canada). We have to mark these points; that, which is formulated above, in our view, is a part of how the country sees Mr. Putin in the coming years; views of the people of his age do not change.

The feeling of mistrust to the USA is widely spread in Russia according to polls; and this feeling is a ground for popular appeals to the Russian authorities to rely basically on the national military might in any international talks. It also means that Putin’s rhetoric has found domestic audience. It is a part of the game that brings Putin success on elections. In our opinion, he personally will continue to play this game in the observed future. Thus, Putin administration can safely focus on the arms race, the great sports construction projects and not to worry much about the public protest rallies. And we doubt that the mentioned trend will be changed during the coming Putin terms. Perhaps, we could (or should?!) continue speaking of a “reset” of the regime of “competitive coexistence” between USA and RF. It means that national interests of both nations will be clinched in the foreseeable future, because the Putin’s dream to establish the Eurasian Union makes the US leadership not happy.

Here, we wish to say a few words about the regime of “competitive coexistence”. In our view, it may be useful to rethink the certain similarities that exist between today’s global challenges and those that were faced or anticipated in the last (20th) century. For instance, in retrospect, there was an impressive record of Soviet and American cooperation in restraining competition, what likely seemed to lead to war. This pattern could be replicated in the 21st century. The assumptions underlying such an approach are as follows: 1) that the Russian Federation has interests that go beyond simply perpetuating the post-Cold war international system; and 2) that the Russian Federation can better secure its national interests by seeking the Western (American, first of all) cooperation despite all existing discrepancies rather than on a way of confrontation.

If one bears in mind a visible shift of Russia’s economic interests to the East, an improvement of trade relations with China, etc., the conclusion

concerning the future US-Russia-Europe relationships will be the same. As it is said, the “regime of competitive coexistence” is coming back; yet the rivalry is and will likely be not as strong as it was between the Soviet Union and USA in the past. Today, of course, even in the worst nightmares no one can imagine an armed (nuclear) conflict between the former rivals. However, the historical memory in both nations has not gone away and it is a source of mutual mistrust.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have considered only few general themes where sociology is linked with politics and geopolitics. The calendar prompts reappraisals of the views as well as of the past trends. And therefore, we have been cautious in the projections of the future because we are not satisfied with most forecasts. We have wished to emphasize the following simple idea: the plans and intentions are one thing, while the military capabilities and the military installations – another; the first thing is non-material, the second is a material one. History proves it. We kept in mind the difference between military budgets – Russia’s budget is smaller than the American one about 10 times and smaller than the Chinese one at least 3-5 times. We do agree that contemporary Russia strongly needs foreign investments for developing of its overall economy. But also we know that there investors have are a lot of concerns. What is really important to bear in mind in view of the “gloom” of Russia’s potential is that it does not need dramatic economic growth rates. It just needs to avoid crises and conflicts.

The feeling of mistrust towards the Western partners is a basis of the so-called “moderate anti-Americanism” of Mr. Putin. And we doubt that the mentioned trend will be halted during the coming terms. Using the term “anti-Americanism” we do understand that it is not a very intelligent and correct word, yet, it is used by the media quite frequently. It should be noted that the term “America” actually refers to the whole hemisphere making the term “anti-American” also a sign of geographical confusion. We speak of an open anti-US attitude of the personality or as it showed in public.

As for US-Russia relations, please, let us remind of the Ronald Reagan’s phrase “Trust, but verify”, which was a good guiding principle for Cold War arms negotiators in the 1980s and is still apt for today’s US-Russia fragile reconciliation.¹⁶ Despite the problems temporal settlements may cause,

16 James F. Collins and Mathew Rojansky, “Why Russia Matters. Ten reasons, why Washington must engage Moscow”, *Foreign Policy*, August 18, 2010 (on web).

Washington and Moscow leaders and the public at large should not overstate their importance for the overall reconciliation process.

In our opinion, within the changing global context Russia's relations with China, India, and, of course, Iran not merely reduced to trading, but they basically about influence the global arena. International trading – even arms trade, which Russia does rather well, – is also an important engine for internal economic growth and modernizing of the aging Russian huge military-industrial complex and for sustaining the Russian economy as a whole. For Russia's administration, the American permanent pressure on Iran – from the decision to limit sales to Iran in 2001, to stop Tehran nuclear enrichment program in 2005 and so forth. Thus, I think that it was and it is not just about the losses of Russian revenues linked to the failed economic contracts, but about diluting Russia's 'soft power' undermining Russia's re-emerging international influence.

If Mr. Putin returns to the Kremlin for the third presidential (now 6-years) term, he will put his nation into an inevitable search for new politics, but, in our opinion, the essence of Russian security and foreign policies is not to be changed dramatically and in a moment. Frankly, during the reign of President Medvedev (2008-2012), the author has had a feeling of *déjà vu*, when witnessing how a certain way of using pressure in international affairs was considered "legitimate", how political disputes pertaining to foreign policy and international relations were stirring up, how they were covered by the local and international media, and how they were settled, how tough rhetoric does not lead to nothing. The reference to so-called "tandem's" foreign policy does not help much.

As for the coming future, it seems that Russia will not allow the so-called "Libyan (2011) scenario" to repeat in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, yet it respects the right of nations for self-determination alike other provisions of international law which is still full of controversial principles. Here we disagree with those colleagues who argue that "the Eurasian region continues to disintegrate and neither Russia, nor the West has been able to arrest the destabilizing dynamics".¹⁷

Please keep in mind, dear reader, that today's Russia is very different from the USSR. So is the Russian perception of the forces that drive international

17 Andrei P. Tsygankov, "The heartland no more: Russia's weakness and Eurasia's meltdown". *The Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1-6.

relations in the first quarter of the 21st century. And Russia suggests that the West should acknowledge these differences, for instance, when engaging this country into a new alliance to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power. The coincidence of national interests of Saudi Arabia (the main regional rival of Tehran), Israel (Tehran's enemy number one), and the USA (the nation is striving to solve the so-called "Iran nuclear issue" by military force serving as the world hegemony) makes the use of force against Iran more likely than before, especially if one bears in mind that the psychological and propaganda preparations for this action are under way. (We are here talking about the motives, principles and mechanisms for making major international decisions. The leaders should be careful with threatening gestures and alarming words in the case of Iran, in our view. The diplomatic activity around Iran and Syria creates a collision, the outcome of which depends on more factors than just wishes of Putin or Obama).

The creation of Eurasian Union, the Putin's greatest target, in our opinion, is unreachable without significant improvement of Russia's hard and soft power in the foreseeable future. The Russian politics will be subordinated to the main task. Moscow will go ahead to implement Putin's re-integration plan into practice despite the US objections. The today's problem is not whether Russia and the USA are slipping into a new Cold War or not, but the 'reset' of relations between the Russia and the West as a whole.

In late October 2011, the Right-Liberal electronic Russian media source wrote: "John Beyner, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, directly accused the Russian government and Putin personally for using Soviet foreign policies, having nostalgia for the Soviet Union and calling for a reversal of the "reset" between Moscow and US, while never actually "resetting" Russia's foreign policy... A potential boon to Putin administration would be the election of a republican US President whose foreign policy stance would almost certainly contain strong anti-Russian rhetoric. If that happens, the Russian foreign policy could be built upon the tradition pattern that exploits the old (Soviet) views of the West, thus mobilizing the Russian population. Abroad, though, a mutually beneficial project with selected foreign companies would be allowed to continue its work in order to buy the loyalty of Western elites and secure oil and gas money. The question that remains is – Would the financial resources of such a foreign policy dry up in a worsening global economic climate".¹⁸

18 Opinions: "Cold War premonitions", *Gazeta*, 2 November 2011.

Let us leave this projection without broad comments. It seems to us that, first of all, there is a need to rid of political “antipathy” that blinds critics of Russia’s advantages such as its strong position in technology, education and so on. Second, Putin’s return as Russia’s President does not meet applauses either in the Western media or in the domestic Right-wing (Liberal) media. But is this fact unexpected? For sure, critics of “personalized power” are afraid of reality. Third, Putin’s “soft cult of personality” is strong indeed and nobody in the world knows when it will pass away. In truth, the ex-spy’s character has not changed, Putin simply only matured. Fourth, a possible victory of Republicans at the next US presidential elections, in our opinion, may (or will) lead to an increase of political competition (or confrontation, if the reader prefers this word) amongst the post-Soviet nations showing no interest in a prolongation of the American global hegemony into the depth of the 21st century and gathering around the Russian Federation. For this reason, plus a clash of national interests, it will be more difficult to implement in practice the new version of the US-Russia politics of *détente*. And fifth, last but not least, it is premature to speak whether the character of US-Russian and/or Russia-EU relations will change after the 2012 presidential elections in USA or not and guess how. Contemporary Russia is no easy partner for the United States of America and the European Union. It demands, perhaps, more respect than the Americans and the Europeans are eager to show, but, in our opinion, in some plausible circumstances co-operation between the former rivals is inevitable. And let us forget about “making friends”! There is no point.

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**MEDVED I SVET: PROJEKCIJE RUSKE POLITIKE POSLE
PUTINOVOG POVRATKA U KREMLJ 2012**

APSTRAKT

U članku autor govori o projekcijama ruske politike posle povratka Vladimira Putina u Kremlj 2012. Pažnja je usmerena na pitanja bezbednosne i spoljne politike. Autor ih razmatra zajedno sa pitanjima vezanim za unutrašnju politiku. U delu članka se istražuje kako predloženo povećanje sredstava za vojne potrebe utiče na rusko društvo, državnu politiku u celini, kao i na druga relevantna pitanja. Autor insistira na tome da povećanje/smanjenje temperature na relaciji SAD-Rusija i Rusija-EU teško da može da bude samo briga Rusije.

Ključne reči: Rusija, Putin, bezbednosna i spoljna politika, projekcija.