

THE FUTURE OF THE WEST-RUSSIA RELATIONS: THE ROLE OF CULTURAL AND CIVILIZATION FACTOR

Recently, the general state of the socio-political discourse on the issues of the relations between Russia and the West has been the source of concern. Harsh assessments and doom-laden forecasts have nothing to do with statements by the top leadership and the minister of foreign affairs that are kept in the spirit of classical diplomacy and neither close any doors, nor burn any bridges, and that inspires optimism.

Really, the situation has been aggravated, our Western opponents refer to belligerent declamations and use irresponsible words as the Skripal case and recent escalation around Syria demonstrated. But there is an explanation for that: now it's their turn – after China and Russia – to come across stagnation/decline, systemic crisis of the society and a challenge to its complex transformation. We should add that Western elites turned out intellectually unsound; they are at a loss and cling like grim death to the status quo politics as having no alternative. This is understandable: how could the hothouse conditions of the Cold War and euphoria of “the end of history” after as if “victory” in it prepare for such fundamental challenges?

Besides, the whole complex of the Russia-West relations cannot be reviewed outside the wider, global context. Everything in the world is moving – there is nothing permanent left, at least from what everyone has become used to over the whole post-war period, which turned to be the notorious time wrap both in the international relations and capitalist economy. It was easy to forget about the age-old experience of the whole proceeding history over the life of the three generations. The established policy has worn out and stopped being in accordance with the requirements of the current development. Because of that any talks about the status quo that cannot be, and “revisionism”, in which Russia is accused, have no sense. Hence special demands to personalities of the leaders that found

themselves both in America and Europe in the conditions previously described as Bonapartism.

Averaging at the level of political orientation and practical politics destroys political systems and nearly the very political process in Western countries. Because of that the end of the Cold War without formal post-war settlement really became a geopolitical catastrophe and one of the reasons of upheavals ripening in the West. Their seeds refer to the earlier period – this is the Bretton Woods system based on the dollar, its one-sided reform via annulment of the gold standard at the peak of the Vietnam War in 1971, erosion of the Glass-Steagall Act and many other things. They carry the generic features of the Western society in themselves, the political culture of elites, its cultural genotype that determined the fates of Christianity in the West, first of all in its key segments – Anglo-Saxon and German. The experience of the comparable previous transformation moments shows that leaders in order to satisfy their requirements have to undergo their personal transformation. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, John Kennedy and, to my mind, Nikita Khrushchev were like that. Now, only Donald Trump among Western leaders can have such a conditionally revolutionary potential.

About “the Russian responsibility” for the today’s crisis in our relations with the West. In my opinion, we behaved peacefully, conciliatory and moderately. We reacted only when it was already impossible not to react, preempting a bigger disaster, for example, another Crimean War and establishment of the Sunni fundamentalist regime in Syria. The experience in Syrian crisis’ development convinces that clearly there are not so many people left in such a civilized country, ready to fight for it on both sides, as a result of which it would have sooner or later become the prey of outsider Jihadists, and that in its turn would have guaranteed structuring of the whole regional policy in line with the Sunni-Shiite confrontation. By that time Russia got a small potential for projecting force, satisfying the set tasks and, it must be said, a wider potential for opposing external challenges, including information challenges.

It is clear that before improvement of our relations with the West, they should degrade even more. At least, till the point when Europeans will no longer risk going step-in-step with Washington in military escalation because of the threat of war already in Europe. It seems that this moment will determine the rock bottom, after which stabilization and straightening of our relations will start. Transatlantic disagreements are already evident on the issue of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's Nuclear Program, which the United States have already left.

Including because of that, Europe should not be given up, it's coming home after tough ideological incarnation in the form of historical and as if timeless West. Geopolitical solitude does not threaten Russia here either. I remember that when NATO and the European Union expanded, we told our Western partners that they should not hurry with conclusions as the East Europeans' view of life is closer to ours, i.e. traditional and conservative. These countries preserved the potential of historical vigilance in "Soviet captivity" (if we use Western terms), and that is manifested differently already within the frameworks of NATO and EU. Everything may change in time but not in the foreseeable future. Everyone has to proceed from the today's requirements. By the way, when John Maynard Keynes was told about the usefulness of long-term decisions, he answered that all of us would die in long-term perspective. Had Franklin Roosevelt limited the measures during the Great Depression by long-term ones only, half of the Americans would have died from hunger.

Though everyone says that Russia is not challenging the West ideologically, it's exactly like that in practice, only not in the previous system of ideological coordinates but in the new one – the majority becoming sovereign against cosmopolitan liberalism of elites in Western countries themselves. In principle this is no less dangerous for elites themselves that are inclined to view this "Russian challenge" as existential – at the level of the "Soviet" one from the Cold War period. However, at that time West European economy was "socialized" in

response to the “Soviet Union’s challenge” and a sustainable model of socioeconomic development was formed. Its destruction as a result of Reaganomics/Thatcherism was related to forgetting the lessons of the Great Depression and coincided in time with the end of the Cold War and disintegration of the USSR. The destructive impact of the visible disappearance of competitive environment and technocratic approach to social processes played their role: if there is not one ideology and development model, then the whole space (and time) are taken by their antipodes, and *automatically*.

What does, in my opinion, allow to look with optimism at the future of relations between Russia and the West?

First, the crisis in the West should not be ignored, it is a part of the context that often determined the significance of some or the others phenomena. The crisis is existential, and because of that it provides dangerous ejections outside – as a variant of a kind of crisis mobilization of Western elites. They hold on to the slipping away status quo, including the established globalization format, and globalization is not thought of other than as an inalienable condition for the “liberal order” (domestic and international). Another consequence of this state of affairs is that we are dealing not only with elites but also with protest voters. The main thing is that we have no problems with the people of European countries, and that should not be forgotten.

Second, the whole global politics entered the end game – after hovering in the “anteroom” of the period after the Cold War. Actually, these 25 years that were required for the Western elites to comprehend the real meaning of “the end of the Cold War”, pulled the 20th century into the 21st century, which to a large extent starts from 2014, i.e. the Ukrainian crisis. The nature of the end game is that all processes are sharply accelerating and events may fairly take the collapse scenario. We in Russia have to be internally ready for that. We have a lot of strategic patience: it’s enough to take the time from the Munich speech of the President Vladimir Putin to the Ukrainian and Syrian crises.

Russia responded but did not outrun the development of events; it did not violate history and did not engage in social engineering at the international level. As a result, both crises turned out to be manageable, and to manage several crises simultaneously is possibly an unprecedented achievement in the history of international relations. Moscow does not set ultimate tasks in the sense of the ultimate solution of some or the other problems. Such an approach is the function of the protestant view of life in the spirit of “the end of history”, a possibility of rational settlement of humans in this world, outside God and history.

That which is usually called “the crisis of liberal order” refers us to such fundamental ideas as freedom, the balance of rights and responsibilities. The evident excess of the first was witnessed in recent decades. In this connection I’d like to give the opinion of the Most Reverend Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, presented in his research of Dostoyevsky (*Dostoyevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction*. ROSSPAN. Moscow, 2013, p.34). He writes addressing the sketches of “revolutionary” freedom, outlined in *Demons*, that here there is a diagnosis of pathological fantasies about absolute freedom presented to us, it can be compared to the one worded in *The Phenomenology* by Hegel: “freedom without limits” is the dream of freedom, in no way dependent on any other – human, non-human or divine – will; as there is no “other” existing for it, it also loses its content. But it follows that the desire of such freedom cannot be only embodied in destruction ...; self-destruction becomes the culmination of that. The author refers to Terry Eagleton’s authority (Eagleton T. *Holy Terror*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.71): according to him, as limitations make us as we are, the idea of absolute freedom is doomed to be terrorist.

The idea of “the end of history”, i.e. a possibility of “the final statement” is directly connected with the subject of freedom. Exactly negation of such a possibility runs through all Dostoyevsky’s creative works. The Soviet Union’s experience proved in the course of history that he was right, now the Western society proves it by its experience.

Russia proceeds from life in its foreign policy, fitting in its flow, it behaves flexibly and takes decisions as it goes along; it does not shy away from modest but realistic results as well as network diplomacy, negating the very division of partners into allies and enemies, which is fairly in the spirit of our transitional time, requiring complex “reevaluation of values”. The American elite only begin to understand the lack of options of such a response format, but they are not ready psychologically for such a “change of course” as they have to refuse from the too fundamental for their self-awareness things. And they have to normalize, of all things, to become a normal country like others. Because of that it is easier to transfer into a new state via neo-isolationism and even “from the position of strength”.

Third, Russia found itself on the razor’s edge of the USA/West geopolitical pressure – hence the acuteness of our antagonisms. But this is also brought about by our history, proving the pseudomorphous (according to Oswald Spengler) nature of the Russian society’s development. I tried to substantiate the dialectics of our participation in common, exactly common European affairs in my article “The Geopolitics of the Russian Revolution” (*International Life* magazine, March, 2018 and the Russian International Affairs Council website). Numerous convergent moments over at least three last centuries speak in favor of that. This is inevitable in the present and in the future as it was inevitable in history. We have been living in such period from the middle of the 1980s, and the oncoming movement on the part of the West was outlined with the start of the 2008 global financial crisis.

The history of Europe would have been absolutely different without that and, most likely, much more disastrous, for example, had Russia joined the orbit of Germany united under the Prussian power, refusing from its natural right to historical creativity, and inter-western bipolarity would have gotten the upper hand in the world – the Anglo-Saxons on the one side, and the German and Japanese Empires on the other side.

Russia has to wait when Western elites get used to the new reality, first of all under the impact of their own electors, and at the same time demonstrate readiness for dialogue and cooperation, without stopping promotion of the positive agenda in global and regional affairs. The main thing is to attain restoration of the political unity of Europe/European civilization, including its North American branch and Russia, on the extra-bloc grounds. This could be in the interests of all members of the European family in the qualitatively new competitive global environment, when Europe can no longer force its will and its values upon the rest of the world and should prove its cultural and civilization compatibility with it. In my opinion, the uniting/balancing (no matter how you call it) role of Russia in world politics at the contemporary stage can be exactly in that.